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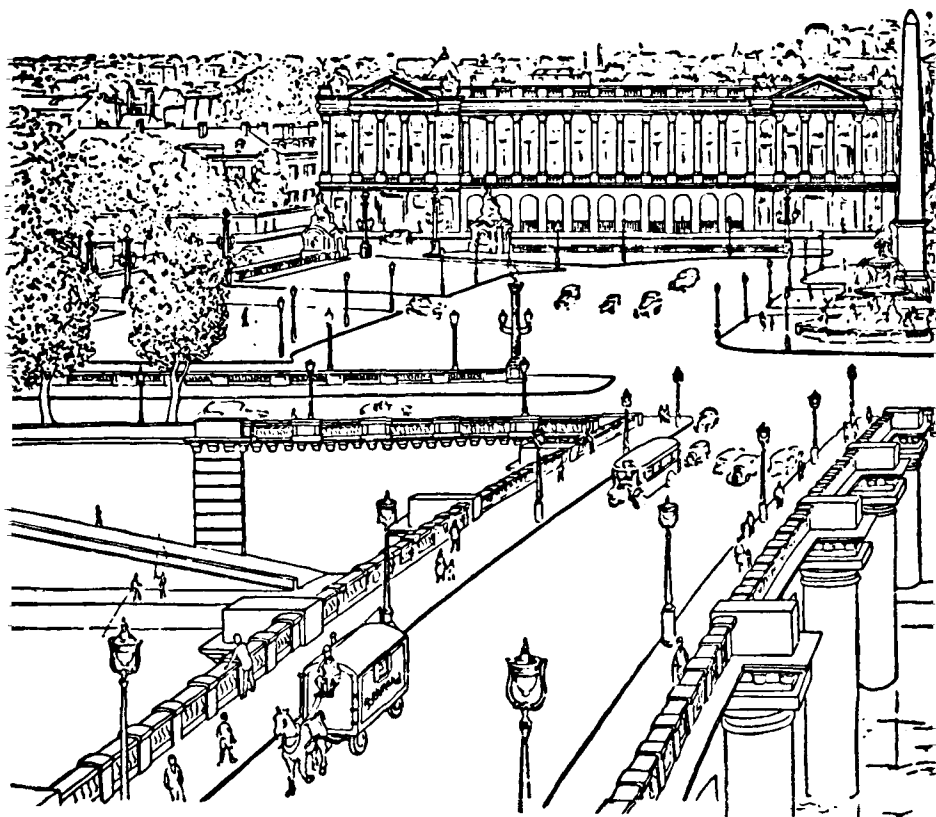
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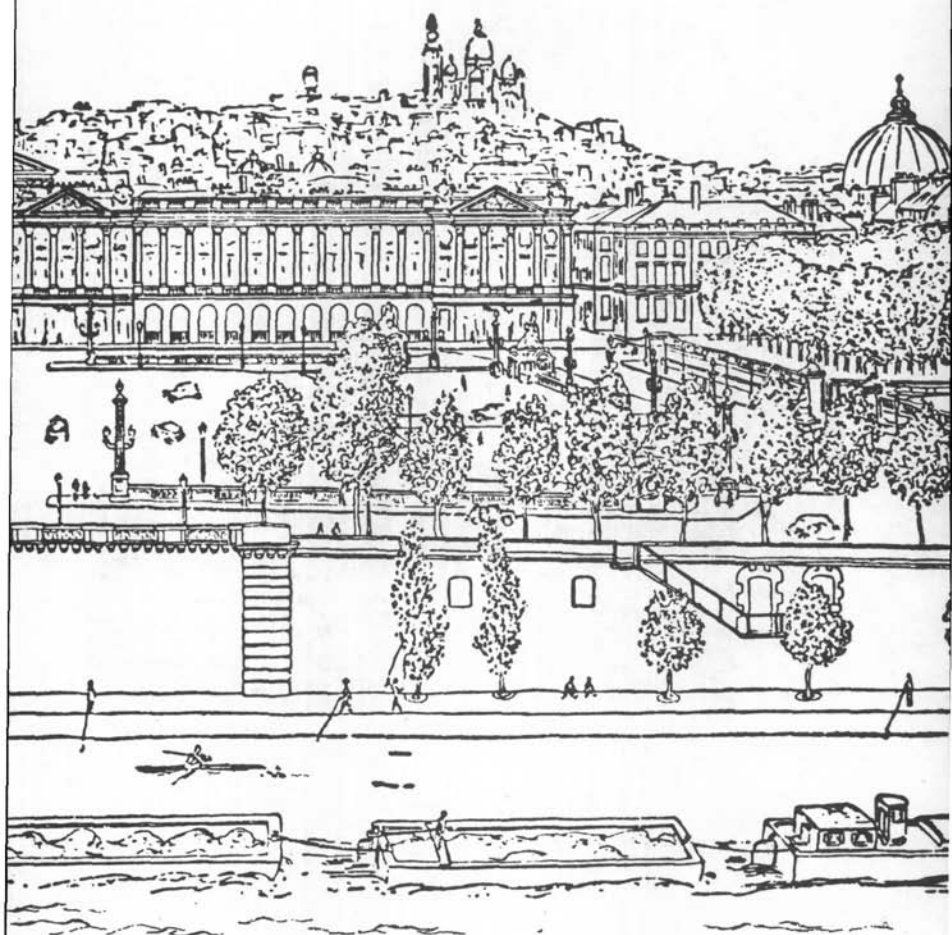
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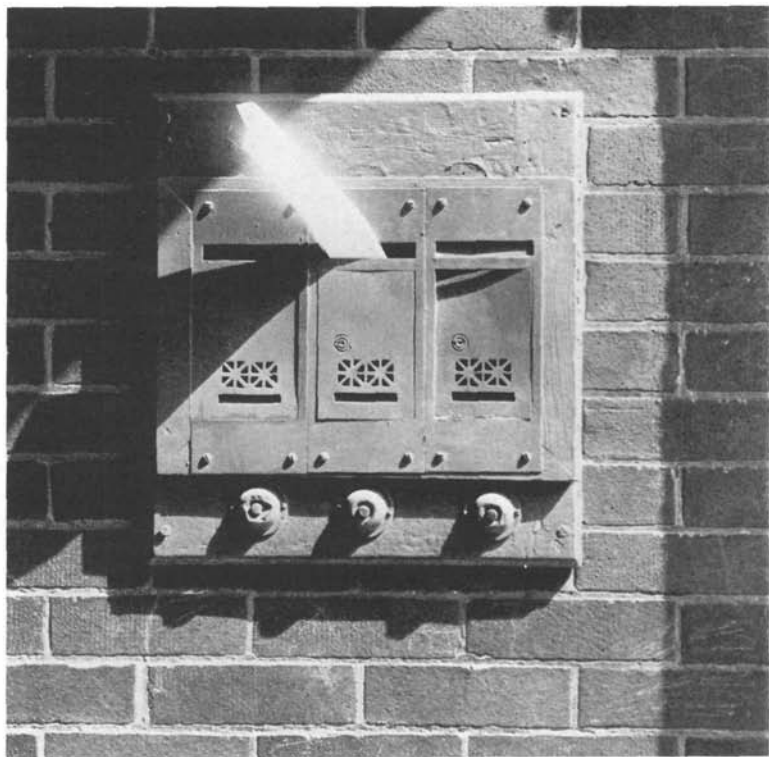


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Number 67



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NOTICE

Not long ago the managing editor of this magazine asked, “Who *are* all these people?” She was referring to those listed on the masthead of *The Paris Review*—which is indeed a solid bloc of names, as if a page torn from the telephone directory had somehow settled into place on the printing press. The list runs from the top of the page to the bottom. The managing editor has been with the magazine for over four years. She remarked, “There are almost sixty names here. I hardly know any. What do they do?”

An inspection revealed that her mathematics were indeed correct, and that in truth some of those listed had not communicated with the magazine for many years. Their subscriptions had elapsed and it was thought that perhaps one or two had died. A pruning process seemed called for

Within a day or so of the publication of the “streamlined” masthead the following communication, excerpts from which appear below, was received from one of the expunged:

Dear—

. . . . *It has come to pass that, without my even “resigning”, I am no longer an Advisory Editor of the Paris Review.* John Phillips

graces the masthead no more, and the chagrin of it is devastating.

I first felt the sting a couple of weekends ago when my 14-year-old son James came home from Andover, where everybody reads the Review. "Hey," he told me, "I thought you said you were supposed to be an Advisory Editor of the Paris Review. Well, you're not." Before I could remonstrate he showed me the latest issue, where from all that proliferation of friends and helpers past and present this one was absent.

Absent also, as my shamefaced researches have revealed, are the names of that capital chap, physician and raconteur, Jonathan Miller, and of Ben Johnson—I don't doubt also a swell fellow but whom, like so many of my quondam merry colleagues on that crowded page, I have not had the pleasure of meeting. . . . The Johnson-Miller-Phillips line has been cast into the hopper of oblivion.

Was it something I said, George? What could I have done? I fear your answer will be quite simply, "nothing". Johnson, Miller, and I have done, literally, nothing. Nothing either to subvert or to assist the publication which for years had flattered us with honorific titles. That being so, I don't dispute the justice of our being cast out. And yet I can only wonder how much more than nothing is expected of an Advisory Editor?

The letter was signed, "Your crestfallen, John P. Marquand."

Marquand's letter (his *nom de plume* is John Phillips) was not the only stirring of reaction . . . proving that if nothing else the masthead is apparently read with great care. These offices, dismayed, rushed to make amends. Marquand was written a letter which began, "Rarely, indeed since Jason pleaded with Medea for the lives of their children, has there been such a moving message as yours. . . ." He was informed, along with the others, that the Johnson-Miller-Phillips trio had been plucked out of the "hopper of oblivion" and reinstated . . . which indeed can be checked by an inspection of the masthead of this present issue (unless that heavily-read page has been torn out by an over-eager reader).

How odd, upon recollection, to have considered dispensing with this valuable trio. Ben Johnson, though this magazine has not heard from him in fifteen years, was responsible for the first publication in English of a number of Italian writers, among them Dino Buzzati and Italo Calvino. John Phillips, the aggrieved letter-writer,

not only contributed some of his own work ("The Engines of Hygeia" and "Beat Blodgette") but found us the unpublished Malcolm Lowry manuscript entitled *Lunar Caustic* about the author's incarceration in the mental ward at Bellevue (issue #29). Jonathan Miller put together an extraordinary photographic essay of an autopsy which remained unprinted since the magazine could never discover the identity of the gent on the slab in order to ask (if somewhat hesitatingly) the nearest of kin for permission to publish.

These offices should have known better than to tamper with the masthead. In the earliest days of the magazine Harold L. Humes, one of the founders and who was expected to function as its first managing editor, took to reading *Huckleberry Finn* on the steppes of La Rotonde in Montparnasse and working on his estimable first novel, *Underground City*, instead of performing his duties . . . and was thus peremptorily lowered down the masthead to the position of Advertising and Circulation Manager. This uncalled for debasement came to his attention when the shipment of the first issue of the magazine arrived in New York from France. Humes took action, not by writing an aggrieved letter à Marquand, but by going down to the wharves with a rubber stamp made up with his name and an exalted title; he got into the shipping crates where he began stamping the masthead page in red ink, half a thousand or so copies, until his arm got tired.

Since that time it has always been a principle of *The Paris Review* that recognition of effort on its behalf, however slight, can only be acknowledged (since financial remuneration is limited) by being added to the masthead. In an Index published this year (\$2.00 a copy—apply to these offices) a total of 188 names of "merry colleagues" were listed as having helped the magazine at some stage in its life.

Many papers and magazines refuse to recognize the labors of their minions, much less the guiding spirits. *The New Yorker* lists only seven names, Mr. William Shawn, its editor, not among them. *The New York Times* has fifteen. Others do better. *The New York Review of Books* lists twenty-three, *Harper's* twenty-four, and *Playboy* (circulation 6,000,000) has an eighty-three name masthead. Of our brethren, *Partisan* lists forty-five; *Antaeus*, twenty; *The Hudson Review*, thirteen; *Transatlantic Review*, nine; *Ploughshares*, five; and the *Unmuzzled Ox* only four.

With its sixty, *The Paris Review* is high on the counts of both commercial and literary magazines . . . twenty-five ahead of *The New Republic*, twenty-nine in front of the *Atlantic Monthly*, ten over *Esquire*, twenty-seven over the *Saturday Review*, and seven atop the *National Lampoon*. * The champion of all is *Rolling Stone* with 119—certainly a target to shoot at if we can survive over the coming years . . . which might be easier if we could only get all our masthead people to subscribe!

G.A.P.

*The newsmagazines, of course, with their information-gathering operations are up on another plateau. *Time* has 297 names on its masthead, including someone named Minnie Magazine (a code name, we understand) who works on the News Desk. *Newsweek* (223 names) has a general editor named J.K. Footlick.

The Grand Turk

Daniel Boulanger

The morning was a sealed envelope. Madame Armance Lénôt had touched her dry, white lips to it one last time, and the light had gone from it, as it goes a moment for those who shut out a love letter by closing their eyes, only for her, her eyes wide open, it was forever. For several years people and things had been losing shape and color, objects coming to life while persons turned to seaweed, then cement. Distances and time no longer had their geometry. Even clocks changed into flowers, which faded. And yet, well into her advanced old age, Armance had walked with her brisk little step, read books with a magnifying glass, texts she relished quickly or tossed aside the way she brushed crumbs from her bosom during her greedy breakfasts of cakes and sweets. Even the family she no longer saw except on her birthday and special holidays, even its impact was weakening. Of the big joyous bouquets in which her daughters-in-law had stuck their prickly and sometimes frightening wild flowers, soon nothing remained but the gaunt transparent pattern of the gypso-

philiat, and in the house where the old lady's vision foundered, darkness drew its uniform heavy velvet funereal hangings closer in around her. And then there was that sealed morning.

Of all that had sung out in the house, only Esther's voice droned on, the English lady's companion the sons had given their mother, nearly five years ago, strong as a horse. Now, they reasoned, Madame Lénor had everything she needed, being rich as the bank across the boulevard and replete with memories, of trips, of men, of tokens of love. Certainly she had lived long and well enough, they felt, remaining egotistical and faithful to the appetite that made her love all sorts of things: a stranger's glance, the street, the flowers on the table and even her husband who had received clients here, within these walls, wrote his summations to the jury here and later, disillusioned by his fellow men, here became a famous corporation lawyer, making fortunes on sunken cargoes, scrap metal deals, oil embargoes, delayed or hijacked shipments of arms.

"Esther," said Madame Lénor, "Esther?"

"Here I am, Madame."

"It's all over," said the blind woman, rising from the chair she sat in part of the day near the window. "Esther, now the street is a sea of water and I saw it rise. Where are you? Give me your hand."

The English woman approached her mistress timidly, although she was usually quite brusque.

"You're trembling?" Madame Lénor asked. "Yes, you're trembling! And you're not the one who's blind! I am. But I've prepared myself for it. Your hand is freezing. Here, let me warm it for you."

Esther could not bring herself to believe that the eyes she gazed into were sightless now and she looked away, giving herself time to think of how to put it when she announced that she was going home, to the house she'd bought in South London since being in the Lénors' employ. Of course she

could still get a good rent for it for a few more years, but her mistress's disability, dreaded for so long, filled her with terror.

"Madame," she began . . .

"No, Esther," the blind woman cut her off, "I won't tolerate pity. No use crying over spilt milk. I will simply obey you. Our roles will be reversed, and you'll probably just love it. Everyone deserves a chance to give the orders!"

The old lady smiled and Esther could not see the slightest flicker in her fixed, transparent, russet pupils.

"But there's no point in telling the others yet," she added. "Easter is only three days off. They'll all come here for dinner. I won't leave the table, and then I'll pretend I'm tired and go to my room. They'll leave around five and you'll say, after looking in on me, that I'm sleeping like a top."

"And after that?" asked Esther.

"After that? You mean after this last holiday is over?"

"Last holiday," sighed Esther. "Why say that?"

"Last," Armance repeated. "After that, I have my plan."

Things went just as she had said. Easter Sunday, at the usual banquet, Armance pretended she could see, turning her head this way and that and even acting giddy enough to sing a popular tune before rising from the table and walking surefootedly to the door to the stairs, having rehearsed each step twenty times on Saturday. All the children applauded when she turned, one hand on the knob, to smilingly bow to the group.

"Yes, Madame, just the rawhide valises."

"Exactly," said Armance. "Pack all my woolens in one, and in the other my summer things and the books you'll read to me: I only want to take confessions, as many as possible. My husband put them away on the top shelf in the little parlor. Some of them are a little off-color. You'll find those at the back, bound with metal clasps, made up to look like missals. Don't forget. And no hat boxes. Just my wigs and scarves. I shall never have looked so young! Have you got the answers to the letters to Me. Querel? and the order from the travel agency?"

“The tickets are right here,” Esther said. “Our first train leaves tomorrow at 8:15. We catch the plane around noon.”

“Splendid. We’ll save Paris for when we get back. Esther, you are going to see all the things that I would like to see again, only you’ll be describing them to me. Before I die, I want to put on the jeweled necklace of all the cities I have adored: Prague, Venice, Cairo, Granada, Quebec, New York and your London, then my dear Holland, then Paris. And it will be winter, one last time here. I’m so happy!”

Madame Lénor held out her hands and Esther looked at them a moment, reaching towards her, fingers spread, before grasping them and feeling herself pulled, big as she was, tight against the tiny frail woman whose head barely came up to her breasts.

“Good night, Esther. You know I no longer live within these walls. The house has died before me. Go on upstairs. I’ll find my way by myself. I’ll be up later. I’ve always liked to take sleep into bed with me, rather than the other way around. As though it were my favorite child. Turn out the light.”

Esther said good night and started to leave. As she switched off the light, her heart tightened. Madame Lénor was looking towards her and her pale white face shone out alone a moment half way up the room where the chairs, dressers, tables and vases of flowers had just sunk into darkness.

The stay in Prague was cut short because Madame Lénor no longer recognized the sound of the trolley cars. Nevertheless, she wanted to visit one of the alchemist’s shops that overlooked a gully transformed into a zoo, but in the doll-sized stairway that still smelled of that same odor of sugar and wet paper she had savored in the old days while a lion roared down below, no beast echoed the memory and her disappointment deepened when she bought a sausage slathered with mustard at an outdoor stand. Esther described the woman vendor and her black apron embroidered with wild roses. Madame Lénor said:

"No, Esther, the vendor has got to be a man, not a woman. I want to relive my days exactly as they were. I always bought my cooked pears, tomatoes in vinegar and sausages from men. I never knew three words of their language but they all told me stories."

"Be careful of the cars," Esther said, "stay close to me."

"There used to be so few!" the blind woman exclaimed. "Ah, we're coming to the church where Tycho Brahé is buried."

"It's closed," said Esther.

"Are they having a ballet tonight under one of those loggias I loved so much? In a gray and black Italian palace. I saw *Orphée* danced there by a troop of blacks in plumes."

"No," said Esther, "there's a concert in three days, in the People's Auditorium, but it's sold out."

That same night they boarded the sleeper for Trieste. Esther was about to retire to the upper berth after tucking her mistress in the lower when the old lady begged her to sit down beside her and read aloud. Curled up in her nightgown, Esther experienced for the first time a tyranny that she had never known before. But she got the Bible out of her own luggage and began to read, turning by chance to the Apocalypse.

"Enough," said Madame Lénor. "I know all that by heart."

"You really are covering old ground!" Esther allowed herself to remark. "I'll buy a novel at the next station."

"You seem tired," said the old lady. "Your voice is sharp."

Esther snapped the Bible shut and climbed up to her berth without a word, but the old lady rambled on goodnaturedly:

"I haven't told you the most curious part, Esther. I can see better at night. Things stand out more in the dark than in the light. They get denser and move towards me. A novel! What novel do you propose to put me through? Any made-up story is always sillier than the merest fact you read in the newspapers. You're not really going to tell me that you read novels?"

"I've read a few," said Esther. "With characters who've seemed more alive to me than people I've actually known, but please forgive me, Madame, I'm going to sleep."

"What can you see from the window?"

Esther did not open the curtain and answered, rapping loudly on the glass to make believe she was looking out:

"Some lights, Madame. Very few. Probably a village."

"Is there a moon?"

"A beautiful one."

"Any mountains?"

"Yes, and the silhouette of a monastery."

Esther discovered that she could lie and was not disturbed in the least.

The train stopped in a station where a slow voice intoned what probably were its qualities, hoarse above the grinding wheels of a baggage cart, and one sensed the enormous somnolence of the train which two determined engineers would jerk forward again, any moment now, far from the pale-faced clock dangling from its iron strut.

"I'd love to get out," said Madame Lénor, "even just for a second."

Esther faked a light snore and did not answer. When the train started up again she fell asleep in earnest and did not awaken until late the next morning. Madame Lénor had vanished. Esther located her suitcases but not her purse, her bedroom slippers but not her shoes. She slipped into her bathrobe and ran up and down the corridor to the toilets, empty at both ends of the car. She peered into every compartment as the train seemed to be seized by a fever and shrieked its whistle. After asking the conductor and passengers if they'd seen the blind lady go by, no, no one had, she stood hesitating by the alarm signal and glared spitefully at the countryside dancing crazily past outside the lowered windows. Could the old lady have had the strength to throw herself from the train? Esther reached the dining car vestibule, saw the ballast rocks for the tracks flashing by through a hole in the floor, debris from hell, dear God, what a death! But there

beyond the door was Madame Lénor drinking her morning tea beside a man who was buttering a piece of toast for her.

"You scared me out of my wits!" the lady's companion cried.

"Esther, I'd like to introduce you to an officer of the Turkish army," said Madame Lénor. "One would swear he'd always known how much butter I like."

"Madame," said the man, rising.

"Mademoiselle," Madame Lénor corrected him. "Esther has been in my employ for years and I've never known her to have a liason. She's English."

Esther regarded him. A soft black mustache drooped over a gluttonous lower lip. A svelte suit set off a narrow body. The officer inquired what she would like.

"Some tea," said Esther, "the same as Madame."

The Turk smiled at her, passed her a biscuit, launched a fiery "*cameriere!*"

"What does he look like" Madame Lénor asked.

"The waiter?" said Esther.

"Our friend," the old lady answered, turning to her neighbor: "Sir, I picture you as broad as you are tall, a handlebar mustache, short thick hair, with pistachio-green eyes and hairy wrists. Am I right?"

Esther took one of his wrists with confidence and the man winked.

"Quite right," said Esther, blushing, "but the gentleman's wrist is smooth as a child's."

"A uniform covered with medals, I can hear them!" said Madame Lénor.

"That's my watch chain," said the officer.

"The gentleman has ten ribbons," Esther continued, shaking her head so he wouldn't interrupt her fantasy and then, cutting the game short when it no longer amused her, she thanked the waiter who had come to take her order.

"Nothing," said Esther. "I'm going back to my compartment. I feel ridiculous in this outfit."

"How does she look?" asked Madame Lénor.

“Perfectly fine,” said the Turk. “She was just wrong to wear a coat. It’s stifling.”

He winked again at Esther, who looked pale, and said:

“I’ll see Madame safely back to her compartment, Mademoiselle.”

As he escorted her back to her compartment the train began to slow down. They were approaching Munich. In the corridor Esther, fully dressed, her two large valises on the floor, placed a finger on her lips. The officer kissed the blind lady’s hand, shut the door after her and went and rested his hand on Esther’s shoulder. Esther closed her eyes.

“You don’t like her,” he murmured, “you’re leaving her?” and without waiting for an answer “I get off here to make my connection, I’m two cars down, I just have to close my bag. My name is Osman.”

He grabbed both Esther’s suitcases, and she ran after him. The train stopped suddenly and they jumped down onto the platform, without looking back, as though in the wrong.

The neon signs from the street played across the bedroom window and one could hear, discreet yet succulent, the heart and arteries of the hotel: air conditioning, passenger elevators, service elevators, gurgles from the pipes, various clatters from room service.

“German comfort,” said Osman, “is a myth. Everything is a myth except love when it works and you’ve worked wonderfully for me.”

He was washing a foot in the sink, letting his attributes hang down, and Esther admired them once more in repose.

“Why don’t you get into the tub?” she asked. “You might slip. I knew a boy who broke his knee like that. He couldn’t collect the insurance for over a year.”

“I keep myself awake,” said Osman, “by running cold water over my toes. Our first night together, I want my eyes wide open. Esther, you’re the woman I’ve been waiting for: strong, no frills, I mean with all the frills you need and espe-

cially”—in two strides he threw himself onto the bed and took the English woman’s face in his hands, deeply inhaling the corner of her lips—“especially that smell I wanted.”

The frolicking began again with pauses only those in the middle of the road of life can relish, then they lay side by side, hand in hand, reliving in their hearts the madness they had just experienced, astonished that they could still conjure up in themselves the ghosts of their youths. Nevertheless, Esther surprised herself towards morning by saying:

“That poor Armance! I hope someone gave her a hand. No one is lonelier than a blind person, don’t you agree? But what really bothers me is that she’ll never know what became of me. You know she thought of me as a sort of cupboard with drawers that stuck, secret compartments, fancy keys, doors that creaked as they opened. She stuffed everything into this catch-all, which made me valuable in her eyes. Do you think she’ll go ahead with her trip? I could have taken her anywhere, played tricks on her, described all the cities she’d drilled into my head, meanwhile going wherever I pleased.”

“The smells would have been hard to reproduce,” said Osman. “Not to mention the climates. You wouldn’t have been able to fool her for long. Cairo is cloves and saffron in a sweating goatskin and Quebec a hot apple tart set near a sherbet that smells like a young sapling.”

“Don’t make me feel guilty,” said Esther.

“Up!” shouted Osman. “I want to show you the restaurant of my student days. Huge men in leather aprons tapping barrels of light beer right before your eyes. We called it the piss of the gods. Esther! Esther! Esther!!!”

Osman knelt once more between the thighs of his beloved.

“It’s exhausted,” she said simply. “Let it sleep.”

“And gray sausages stuffed with mountain herbs,” said the Turk, standing back up. “You’ll love it.”

They entered a vaulted cellar room that smelled of ironing and cabbage and as Esther remained preoccupied Osman took her hand.

"All the Wittelsback jewels wouldn't amuse you," he said with simplicity. "I thought the English were less sentimental. What on earth are you afraid will happen to that old lady? You've been wanting to leave her for a long time, and now it's done. The fact that she's going to have to get herself back home will distract her and soften the pain, if she has any. I congratulate myself for having made the whole thing easier."

At the back of the room a tableful of guests began to sing despite the morning hour and a waitress in thick white stockings passed with a pyramid of foaming beer mugs on an enormous copper platter.

"You're sorry?" Osman asked.

The English woman did not answer the Turk who, glancing sideways at her, found a person quite different from the one of the night before. A sort of sergeant, regulation, dedication, all she needed was a Salvation Army bonnet, a horse, and a little tuft of stiff hairs under her right ear. A Bavarian waitress brought the sausages Osman had ordered.

"You're not eating?" he asked. "Would you prefer something sweet? *A Delikatesse*? I hardly recognize you," he said.

"Neither do I," said Esther.

"Is your employer really blind?" the officer asked. "Are you sure? If she'd just been putting on an act, would you still feel guilty? Never in my life have I seen such a change, Esther! Where are you? What are you thinking? What have I done to displease you? Did I force you? You were ready to get off that train. I followed you. What's the trouble? What are these adolescent fears? It's enough to take one's appetite away!"

He nevertheless ordered another pair of sausages and finished the beer Esther had barely put her lips to. Then he examined the English woman afresh and found again the one of the night before, that grand happy abandon.

"Would you like me to take you back to the station? Shall we pick up your bags at the hotel and alert the railroads?"

"Yes, at once!" said Esther, rising, "but finish your meal in peace. Meet me at Central Station. I'll wait for you there."

"I'll be there in an hour," said Osman coldly. "The first class waiting room, right?"

"Yes," she said, pressing the hand of his that held the knife.

She smiled tenderly and Osman watched her almost run between the heavy tables, towards the gothic door ornamented with a sheaf of grain.

"Miss Esther Devon," the policeman continued, "here are your papers back, thank you, the telegram arrived this morning and I think the same message went out to all our stations. Madame Lénor Armance is waiting for you in Venice. Would you care to read it?"

From the office under the train platforms, Esther watched the second hand of the big clock tremble as it jumped forward. In the waiting room opposite, the silhouette of the officer came and went.

"Miss Esther Devon, you may send a telegram from the room next door, and for departure times go to information, third door on your left."

The first train for Venice left at noon. Esther sent a telegram to her employer and then joined Osman who still paced in figure eights around her two bags.

"Well," he said, "the most memorable love affairs aren't necessarily the longest. This is perhaps the first time the lovers haven't even told each other the stories of their lives. We know nothing about one another, and yet we'll never be able to look at a glass of beer again without thinking about 'us'. God bless trains! But never go into a dining car again, promise? They're my territory. I shall be leaving this evening. God, yes, God always grants us unexpected little breaks, it's his way of making himself known. The rest of life belongs to the devil."

Esther had resumed the secret smile of women who remain at the bottoms of staircases they could climb if they had a mind to—I could go up, but I won't let myself. Osman carried her bags to her compartment and got off just as the train started.

“Thank you,” said Osman.

Esther leaned out of the door and saw the officer standing stiffly, arms at his sides, his face grave, unrecognizable, sunk back into the world of boredom, and all of a sudden she noticed he was handsome. For an instant, she wondered if all this were true, what she was doing on this train, and why she was leaving the one man in her life. He could not have understood what had just happened to him either, or else he would not have had such deep eyes, that stony immobility on the platform. The train had gone around several curves with Esther still at the window, but she saw nothing of the real countryside, only a sky that became a Turkish rug, curved motifs of ochre and green, perfumes of rose and tobacco. Osman, on a horse whose eyes he flicked with a flyswitch, rode off down a white street, watched by women in bouffant pants who all, behind the wooden grids of their windows, had the face of Esther Devon. Esther shivered to know she was so numerous, as far as the horizon. She went to sit down and closed her eyes.

To reach the hotel Madame Lénor had selected, you had to cross all of Venice. Esther's heart was so shattered it seemed to her that the canals hung from the palaces as elsewhere in primitive towns tapestries ornamented the façades on holidays. Her confusion made the water seem vertical and the boat she had taken cut through the heavy spotted material of the sky like a pair of scissors. She entered the hotel where the desk clerk welcomed her effusively and issued a lilting order to one of the bell boys.

“Madame Lénor's apartment, *secundo piano*. Miss Devon, we thought you'd been hurt, kidnapped, committed suicide, gotten lost. I alerted every station along the way about your disappearance. Madame Lénor has been praying constantly in the church next door and if I may say so has not had a wink of sleep since this awful incident. You'll have to tell us exactly what happened so I may have the honor of recording it in the memoirs I've been writing since I was old enough to hold a pen, with your permission. But then, all things come to an

end, even unpleasant things, and I'm sure we'll be able to make you forget this mishap. Should we send up a cordial, some coffee, both, hot compresses, aspirin, or would you like us to spray your room with essence of thyme? That is Countess Alveoli, our proprietress' secret for regaining one's peace of mind."

Esther regarded the imperial desk clerk.

"Something to eat?" he asked, but his attention was suddenly distracted by a guest who wanted a ticket to a concert that evening and he forgot Esther to remark, picking up the phone, that he almost preferred the Marcello brothers' sonatas to Vivaldi's, a matter of taste of course, but all the same and particularly this evening we would be able to . . . *pronto?*"

Esther stood on the threshold of the apartment not daring to follow the bell boy who set down her suitcases on a folding rack. Beyond, standing in front of the ruffled curtains, Madame Lénot smiled at her, black glasses perched on the end of her nose, arms held out towards the doorway.

"Esther, my dear, you got out to buy a newspaper, was that it? I nearly had a fit. But do you know that I found Chinamen to escort me, Belgians, a Canadian, and now these delicious Italians whose language almost gives me back my sight? Tell me what happened. I must confess, although I'd quite forgotten how to pray, I've warned every saint in heaven to get you back to me or else! But what seemed strangest to me was at the station when we couldn't find your bags, with all those gentlemen so eager to help me, all except that Turk who buttered my toast. You won't believe this, Esther, but I thought you'd gone off with him. Oh don't be mad at me, but he was a real man, I felt he could have turned a statue's head! I was angry with you for a while, but perhaps the motion of the water helped me to forgive you. As soon as I got settled on the hotel launch I smiled at you from afar, envied you even, and time turned inside out like a glove. I took your place. I forgot all about my lawyer husband. I slipped into a pair of silk pants, some necklaces, and went running to every latticed window to wait for Osman to ride by. Esther, my

darling, his horse moved forward soundlessly on paths of wool and my officer smelled of sweat, roses and tobacco, a devastating mixture, you must admit. But dear me, out with the truth. What awful thing really happened to you instead of this daydream? You wanted to leave me!"

"I won't do it again," said Esther.

"My child," said Madame Lénor taking both her hands to pull her to the window. "We shan't travel a step farther. As soon as you're rested we'll go back home and there all you'll have to do when I need you is pull aside a curtain, open a door, lean out over the top of the stairs or sit with me in the wicker chairs in the garden and tell me about my dream cities, my landscapes. That will be as real as reality. I also said to myself that in your shoes I'd make up things to tell the old fool, come come now, it's true, old fool, I know it. Is Mercury still flying from the top of the Customs House? Is *La Salute* still that cresting wave that refuses to break? Tell me. Listen to the siren! Is it still that white boat Venice spits out like an almond?"

"Yes, Madame Armance," said Esther opening the curtains.

"And the water, still that ceramic crackled as far as the eye can see?"

"Yes."

"I'll be the one who tells you how things look, Esther. You correct me when I make a mistake. Look to your right, the fifth palace, the window beside the balcony, on this side. The glass is thick as the bottom of a bottle and swirls like the heart in the grip of great carnal desire, when it hurts so much that your blood runs thick; well, that's where Monsieur Lénor brought me for our honeymoon. Not too original, but neither is love. The palace belonged to friends of his family. I assure you, Esther, I never set much store by the marriage contract, but he was a real husband right away, such a jealous one you can't imagine, and the morning after our first night, a night that lasted thirty-two hours, please note—the smart boy had laid in a supply of wine and cheese—I went to open a window, to get a breath of air, to be nothing more than an idea, than the voile of my nightgown, happy, reduced to nothing, Lénor

had fallen asleep from exhaustion. From the quay across the way a man waved at me and began to sing. I became his little turtle dove. One could hardly ask for more. I gave myself a thousand times like that, everywhere. Esther, bring me a chair."

Madame Lénor had grown pale and was feeling around for a seat. Esther helped her to a chair. The black glasses had fallen to the rug, facing the daylight, and Miss Devon saw clouds racing across their convex surfaces.

There were rains that made sounds like paper and the city emerged from them freshly painted with streaks of sunlight. On the first Sunday after Easter the ladies went to hear mass in the cathedral of San Marco and were surprised to hear instead of the gospel and epistle the spiels of the guides who talked louder than the priest in various languages, among them Dutch. Groups of tourists passed each other gazing up at the golden arches, disappearing into the crypt and reappearing on the balconies. Madame Lénor wanted to eat seafood and led Esther through the maze of narrow streets with a sureness that amazed the English woman.

"Left after the little bridge, then right, two bridges farther on, fifty yards, the arch, another bridge, and there it is, under the arbor. Esther, you must wear different shoes, you sound like a horse. This city calls for soft leather. I thought I was through with giving you orders, I hoped to let myself be led, but you do nothing at all. Have you so much as opened the suitcase full of confessions? Have you read one line aloud to me this week?"

"You never asked me for anything."

"And don't take that hard tone of yours, that icy voice. What's the use, since you don't give orders? One might think you didn't have the least desire to. Have you even taken me to see one painting, even one?"

"We'll go this afternoon."

"To San Rocco, that's it. The exterior, swallow's nest gray,

the interior woodcock purple.”

Esther did not find these colors exact and Madame Lénor was about to lose her temper, maintaining that it was a shame to have eyes and see so poorly. She had positioned herself in the middle of the main galley and her voice was rising.

“Tintoretto is purple, light purple, mainly. Which is, furthermore, the shade of athletes, of full-blooded men. I see his rage, his speed. He had a gift, he used it well, but he would have made an extraordinary porter at Les Halles, and I do love the people and the people are purple, always a wine spot on their shirts.”

“Good heavens, Madame,” said Esther, embarrassed. “People are looking at us.”

“Let them look! Anyhow, when I went to museums, in the old days, nine times out of ten I’d look at the people and not the pictures. Lénor would ask me: well, how was that Chardin you were dying to see again? I’d answer: there was a fantastic hunchback looking at it, a wonder, forgive me and I came across a woman so beautiful I followed her from room to room. She smelled good! I mean her walk, her carriage gave off a perfume and you know she was dressed very simply, no jewelry, nothing fancy, she was smooth, tall, a marble statue, I felt like licking her.”

Esther tugged Madame Lénor gently by the arm, but she persisted in savoring her reminiscences and the guard who rented mirrors for looking at the ceiling circled around them. Art lovers who could only enjoy art in silence waited ominously until the old lady had finished.

“It’s like Siberia in here, let’s go,” said Madame Lénor, and they emerged into a pool of sunshine crossed by flights of pigeons. “They sound like the theater,” she said, “it makes me feel like applauding too.”

They were exhausted when they got back to their hotel and Madame Lénor asked that Esther’s bed be placed in a corner of her own room. The service was immediate and a screen was even set up, although it served no purpose at all, but the thoughtfulness touched the old lady. Esther got a book out of

the big leather bag and began to read as soon as night fell. One could hear the regular muffled thumps of the *vaporetti* against the fenders of the quay and from time to time laughter in the next little street, one would have sworn it was the gurgling of wine in the neck of a bottle.

"The Admiral," Esther read, "was so much in love with his wife that he begged his rival never to leave her since she preferred him to her husband. He pictured them always in each other's arms, but the lover was causing trouble and trying to regain his freedom. 'For mercy's sake,' the Admiral wrote him, 'Leave my beloved with a flattering image of men since she will never have the faintest notion of my passion and devotion. Women like chains that wound them, you will say, so keep up your needling, sharpen your instruments of torture, do not even hesitate to consider the dagger.' "

"They were more complicated than we," Madame Lénot broke in.

"The fatal consequences," Esther continued, "ensued from this advice and the Admiral took the crime upon himself in order to rejoin the adored victim as quickly as possible. As for the criminal lover, he was never even questioned."

"The murderer!" Madame Lénot cried. "I'll bet your Turk has the same blood in his veins. Admit it, Esther, you ran off with him and then got frightened, didn't you? I forgive you."

"Shall I read what happened next?" asked Esther, and hurried on so as not to have to answer. "The dead woman had been pierced with twenty-seven knife wounds and the Admiral explained that he would have liked to kill her several times, liked her to revive so he could stab her again, that death had no doubt come with the first thrust and he regretted not that his wife had not felt what followed but that he had been unable to satiate his own frenzy. He welcomed with a smile the revolver they handed him in his cell to avoid further scandal in the Admiralty and took his own life the way others take medication, with relief."

"Death is for dumbbells," said the old lady. "do me a

favor and burn that book. It's not worthy of either you or me. There are two kinds of books, those that help us to live and the rest of them. Our tree soon enough bears the fruit that are the deaths of others! Tell me about that screen. You know, Esther, only the Catholics could have come up with such a gesture. It has absolutely no use, and yet it says everything. Is it painted?"

"Yes," said Esther who surprised herself lying about the screen of solid cardinal-red velvet. "Some birds are flying along behind some boats and their movement counterbalances the waves."

At the same moment, she wondered what on earth had put such an idea into her head. She fell silent and looked at the old lady dreaming behind her lifeless pupils, then got up to close the french windows again. A gondola was crossing the canal and the moon hung like a funeral wreath on its prow, scattering petals to either bank.

"Night," sighed Madame Lénor, "which existed before we were born! The marsh! That bubble over it suddenly for a moment which is the world. Why have you made me sad? Let's try to retreat back into the night. Go to sleep. Tomorrow we'll start home. All windows are the same to me, after all. I should never have left. While you were in your Turkish harem, yes, yes, I know what I'm talking about, I thought about your house in London. You were so kind to have agreed to accompany me on this impossible tour, but I think it's time for you finally to be in your own home. My accountant will arrange everything as soon as we get back and you can send me some bonbons from time to time. They make the best letters and I do have a terrible sweet tooth. There is nothing on that screen, is there?"

"Nothing," said Esther.

"Thank you for the birds and the sea," Madame Lénor continued. "Imagine that we never left, that we're already on the train home, that we're opening my front door. I hear you rummaging about on your floor, getting your things together, coming down the stairs, you take my hand to say good-bye."

“I shall stay,” said Esther. “You’ll be the one who leaves me. But not for a long time, I hope.”

And so it was. Esther sat at the window each night and dealt the cards of the world. From time to time in the picture she painted of Granada or Riquewihr a man would appear who resembled Osman, now a stevedore, now a prince, and the two women would break into uncontrollable laughter. On the days the family trouped in with its kids, and toys, and flowers, and presents, and airs of not giving a thought to the inheritance, the matriarch and her lady’s companion kept their distance and seemed scarcely able to bear the sight of one another. Sons, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, everyone wondered who this Osman was the two women kept hurling at each other. No one ever saw the fellow, and like those one does not see he assumed a greater power with every visit. No use asking questions, the stranger’s shadow lengthened over the clan.

“He’s a friend,” was all Madame Lénor would say, “isn’t that right, Esther?”

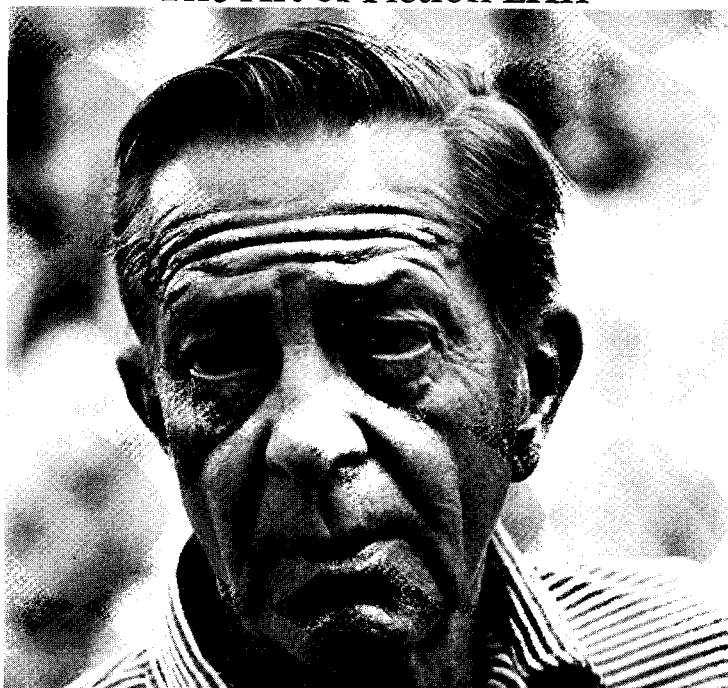
“Your friend, Madame.”

“Oh, Esther, how ugly it is to be jealous!”

—*Translated from the French*
by Patsy Southgate

John Cheever

The Art of Fiction LXII



Nancy Crampton

*The first meeting with John Cheever took place in the spring of 1969, just after his novel *Bullet Park* was published. Normally, Cheever leaves the country when a new book is released, but this time he had not, and as a result many interviewers on the East Coast were making their way to Ossining, New York, where the master storyteller offered them the pleasures of a day in the country—but very little conversation about his book or the art of writing.*

Cheever has a reputation for being a difficult interviewee. He does not pay attention to reviews, never rereads his books or stories once published, and is often vague about their details. He dislikes talking about his work (especially into “one of those machines”) because he prefers not to look where he has been, but where he’s going. Where he has been is impressive.

His collections of short stories are The Way Some People Live (1943), The Enormous Radio and Other Stories (1953), Stories and Others (1956), The Housebreaker of Shady Hill (1958), Some People, Places and Things That Will Not Appear in My Next Novel (1961), The Brigadier and the Golf Widow (1964), and The World of Apples (1973). His novels are The Wapshot Chronicle (1957), The Wapshot Scandal (1964), and Bullet Park (1969). He has recently finished another, due out in the spring of 1977.

For the interview Cheever was wearing a faded blue shirt and khakis. Everything about him was casual and easy, as though we were already old friends. The Cheevers live in a house built in 1799, so a tour of buildings and grounds was obligatory. Soon we were settled in a sunny second-floor study where we discussed his dislike of window curtains, a highway construction near Ossining that he was trying to stop, traveling in Italy, a story he was drafting about a man who lost his car keys at a nude theatre performance, Hollywood, gardeners and cooks, cocktail parties, Greenwich Village in the thirties, television reception, and a number of other writers named John (especially John Updike, who is a friend).

While Cheever talked freely about himself, he changed the subject when the conversation turned to his work. Aren't you bored with all this talk? Would you like a drink? Perhaps lunch is ready, I'll just go downstairs and check. A walk in the woods, and maybe a swim afterwards? Or would you rather drive to town and see my office? Do you play backgammon? Do you watch much television?

During the course of several visits we did in fact mostly eat, drink, walk, swim, play backgammon or watch television. Cheever did not invite us to cut any wood with his chain saw, an activity to which he is rumored to be addicted. On the day of the last taping, we spent an afternoon watching the New York Mets win the World Series from the Baltimore Orioles, at the end of which the fans at Shea Stadium tore up plots of turf for souvenirs. "Isn't that amazing," he said repeatedly,

referring both to the Mets and their fans.

Afterwards we walked in the woods and as we circled back to the house, Cheever said, "Go ahead and pack your gear. I'll be along in a minute to drive you to the station." . . . upon which he stepped out of his clothes and jumped with a loud splash into a pond, doubtless cleansing himself with his skinny-dip from one more interview.

INTERVIEWER

I was reading the confessions of a novelist on writing novels: "If you want to be true to reality, start lying about it." What do you think?

CHEEVER

Rubbish. For one thing the words "truth" and "reality" have no meaning at all unless they are fixed in a comprehensible frame of reference. There are no stubborn truths. As for lying, it seems to me that falsehood is a critical element in fiction. Part of the thrill of being told a story is the chance of being hoodwinked or taken. Nabokov is a master at this. The telling of lies is a sort of sleight-of-hand that displays our deepest feelings about life.

INTERVIEWER

Can you give an example of a preposterous lie that tells a great deal about life?

CHEEVER

Indeed. The vows of Holy Matrimony.

INTERVIEWER

What about verisimilitude and reality?

CHEEVER

Verisimilitude is, by my lights, a technique one exploits in order to assure the reader of the truthfulness of what he's being told. If he truly believes he is standing on a rug you can pull it out from under him. Of course verisimilitude is also a

lie. What I've always wanted of verisimilitude is probability, which is very much the way I live. This table seems real, the fruit basket belonged to my grandmother, but a madwoman could come in the door any moment.

INTERVIEWER

How do you feel about parting with books when you finish them?

CHEEVER

I usually have a sense of clinical fatigue after finishing a book. When my first novel, *The Wapshot Chronicle*, was finished I was very happy about it. We left for Europe and remained there so I didn't see the reviews and wouldn't know of Maxwell Geismar's disapproval for nearly ten years. *The Wapshot Scandal* was very different. I never much liked the book and when it was done I was in a bad way. I wanted to burn the book. I'd wake up in the night and I would hear Hemingway's voice—I've never actually heard Hemingway's voice, but it was conspicuously his—saying, "This is the small agony. The great agony comes later." I'd get up and sit on the edge of the bathtub and chain-smoke until three or four in the morning. I once swore to the dark powers outside the window that I would never, *never* again try to be better than Irving Wallace. It wasn't so bad after *Bullet Park* where I'd done precisely what I wanted: a cast of three characters, a simple and resonant prose style and a scene where a man saves his beloved son from death by fire. The manuscript was received enthusiastically everywhere, but then Benjamin Demott dumped on it in the *Times*, everybody picked up their marbles and ran home. I ruined my left leg in a skiing accident and ended up so broke that I took out working papers for my youngest son. It was simply a question of journalistic bad luck and an over-estimation of my powers. However, when you finish a book, whatever its reception, there is some dislodgement of the imagination. I wouldn't say derangement. But finishing a novel, assuming it's something you want to do

and that you take very seriously, is invariably something of a psychological shock.

INTERVIEWER

How long does it take the psychological shock to wear off? Is there any treatment?

CHEEVER

I don't quite know what you mean by treatment. To diminish shock I throw high dice, get sauced, go to Egypt, scythe a field, screw. Dive into a cold pool.

INTERVIEWER

Do characters take on identities of their own? Do they ever become so unmanageable that you have to drop them from the work?

CHEEVER

The legend that characters run away from their authors—taking up drugs, having sex operations and becoming President—implies that the writer is a fool with no knowledge or mastery of his craft. This is absurd. Of course, any estimable exercise of the imagination draws upon such a complex richness of memory that it truly enjoys the expansiveness—the surprising turns, the response to light and darkness—of any living thing. But the idea of authors running around helplessly behind their cretinous inventions is contemptible.

INTERVIEWER

Must the novelist remain the critic as well?

CHEEVER

I don't have any critical vocabulary and very little critical acumen and this is, I think, one of the reasons I'm always evasive with interviewers. My critical grasp of literature is largely at a practical level. I use what I love, and this can be

anything. Cavalcanti, Dante, Frost, anybody. My library is terribly disordered and disorganized; I tear out what I want. I don't think that a writer has any responsibility to view literature as a continuous process. I believe that very little of literature is immortal. I've known books in my lifetime to serve beautifully, and then to lose their usefulness, perhaps, briefly.

INTERVIEWER

How do you "use" these books . . . and what is it that makes them lose their "usefulness?"

CHEEVER

My sense of "using" a book is the excitement of finding myself at the receiving end of our most intimate and acute means of communication. These infatuations are sometimes passing.

INTERVIEWER

Assuming a lack of critical vocabulary, how, then, without a long formal education, do you explain your considerable learning?

CHEEVER

I am not erudite. I do not regret this lack of discipline but I do admire erudition in my colleagues. Of course, I am not uninformed. That can be accounted for by the fact that I was raised in the tag-end of cultural New England. Everybody in the family was painting and writing and singing and especially reading, which was a fairly common and accepted means of communication in New England at the turn of the decade. My mother claimed to have read *Middlemarch* thirteen times; I dare say she didn't. It would take a lifetime.

INTERVIEWER

Isn't there someone in *The Wapshot Chronicle* who has done it?

CHEEVER

Yes, Honora . . . or I don't remember who it is . . . claims to have read it thirteen times. My mother used to leave *Middlemarch* out in the garden and it got rained on. Most of it is in the novel; it's true.

INTERVIEWER

One almost has a feeling of eavesdropping on your family in that book.

CHEEVER

The *Chronicle* was not published (and this was a consideration) until after my mother's death. An aunt (who does not appear in the book) said, "I would never speak to him again if I didn't know him to be a split personality."

INTERVIEWER

Do friends or family often think they appear in your books?

CHEEVER

Only (and I think everyone feels this way) in a discreditable sense. If you put anyone in with a hearing aid, then they assume that you have described them . . . although the character may be from another country and in an altogether different role. If you put people in as infirm or clumsy or in some way imperfect, then they readily associate. But if you put them in as beauties, they never associate. People are always ready to accuse rather than to celebrate themselves, especially people who read fiction. I don't know what the association is. I've had instances when a woman will cross a large social floor and say, "Why did you write that story about me?" And I try to figure out what story I've written. Well, ten stories back apparently I mentioned someone with red eyes; she noticed that she had bloodshot eyes that day and so she assumed that I'd nailed her.

INTERVIEWER

They feel indignant, that you have no right to their lives?

CHEEVER

It would be nicer if they thought of the creative aspect of writing. I don't like to see people who feel that they've been maligned when this was not anyone's intention. Of course, some young writers try to be libelous. And some old writers, too. Libel, is, of course, a vast source of energy. But these are not the pure energies of fiction, but simply the libelousness of a child. The sort of thing one gets in freshman themes. Libel is not one of my energies.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think narcissism is a necessary quality of fiction?

CHEEVER

That's an interesting question. By narcissism we mean of course clinical self-love, an embittered girl, the wrath of Nemesis and the rest of eternity as a leggy plant. Who wants that? We do love ourselves from time to time; no more, I think than most men.

INTERVIEWER

What about megalomania?

CHEEVER

I think writers are inclined to be intensely egocentric. Good writers are often excellent at a hundred other things but writing promises a greater latitude for the ego. My dear friend Yevtushenko has, I claim, an ego that can crack crystal at a distance of twenty feet; but I know a crooked investment banker who can do better.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that your inner screen of imagination, the way you project characters, is in any way influenced by film?

CHEEVER

Writers of my generation and those who were raised with films have become sophisticated about these vastly different mediums and know what is best for the camera and best for the writer. One learns to skip the crowd scene, the portentous door, the banal irony of zooming into the beauty's crow's feet. The difference in these crafts is, I think, clearly understood and as a result no good film comes from an adaptation of a good novel. I would love to write an original screen play if I found a sympathetic director. Years ago René Clair was going to film some of my stories but as soon as the front office heard about this they took away all the money.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of working in Hollywood?

CHEEVER

Southern California always smells very much like a summer night . . . which to me means the end of sailing, the end of games, but it isn't that at all. It simply doesn't correspond to my experience. I'm very much concerned with trees . . . with the nativity of trees, and when you find yourself in a place where all the trees are transplanted and have no history, I find it disconcerting.

I went to Hollywood to make money. It's very simple. The people are friendly and the food is good but I've never been happy there, perhaps because I only went there to pick up a check. I do have the deepest respect for a dozen or so directors whose affairs are centered there and who, in spite of the overwhelming problems of financing film, continue to turn out brilliant and original films. But my principal feeling about Hollywood is suicide. If I could get out of bed and into the shower I was all right. Since I never paid the bills, I'd reach for the phone and order the most elaborate breakfast I could think of and then I'd try to make it to the shower before I hanged myself. This is no reflection on Hollywood, but it's just that I seemed to have a suicide complex there. I don't

like the freeways, for one thing. Also, the pools are too hot . . . 85°, and when I was last there, in late January, in the stores they were selling yarmulkes for dogs—My God! I went to a dinner and across the room a woman lost her balance and fell down. Her husband shouted over to her, “When I told you to bring your crutches, you wouldn’t listen to me.” That line couldn’t be better!

INTERVIEWER

What about another community—the academic? It provides so much of the critical work . . . with such an excessive necessity to categorize and label.

CHEEVER

The vast academic world exists like everything else, on what it can produce that will secure an income. So we have papers on fiction, but they come out of what is largely an industry. In no way does it help those who write fiction or those who love to read fiction. The whole business is a subsidiary undertaking, like extracting useful chemicals from smoke. Did I tell you about the review of *Bullet Park* in *Ramparts*? It said I missed greatness by having left St. Boltophs. Had I stayed, as Faulkner did in Oxford, I would have probably been as great as Faulkner. But I made the mistake of leaving this place, which, of course, never existed at all. It was so odd to be told to go back to a place that was a complete fiction.

INTERVIEWER

I suppose they meant Quincy.

CHEEVER

Yes, which it wasn’t. But I was very sad when I read it. I understood what they were trying to say. It’s like being told to go back to a tree that one spent fourteen years living in.

INTERVIEWER

Who are the people that you imagine or hope read your books?

*Sovereign
Government
the state
of the country
some
all but
being done*

The main entrance to Falconer--the only entrance for convicts, their visitors and the staff--was crowned by an esutheon representing Liberty, Justice and, between the two, the power of legislation. Liberty wore a mob-cap and carried a pike. Legislation was the federal eagle, armed with hunting arrows. Justice was conventional; blinded, vaguely erotic in her clinging robes and armed with a headsman's sword. The bas-relief was bronze but black these days--as black as unpolished anthracite or onyx. How many hundreds had passed under this--this last souvenir they would see of man's struggle for coherence. Hundreds, one guessed, thousands, millions was close. Above the escutcheon was a declension of the place-names: Falconer Jail 1871, Falconer Reformatory, Fadooner Federal Penitentiary, Falconer State Prison, Falconer Correctional Facility and the last, which had never caught on: Daybreak House. Now cons were inmates, the assholes were officers and the warden was a superintendent. Fame is chancey, God knows but Falconer--with it's limited accommodations for two thousand miscreants was as famous as Old Bailey. Gone was the water-torture, the striped suits, the lock-step, the balls and chains and there was a soft-ball field where the gallows had stood but at the time of which I'm writing leg-irons were still used in Auburn. You could tell the men from Auburn by the noise they made.

Farragut (Fratricide, zip to ten #734-508-32) was brought

A page of the manuscript of Falconer by John Cheever, a novel due to appear in Spring 1977.

CHEEVER

All sorts of pleasant and intelligent people read the books and write thoughtful letters about them. I don't know who they are but they are marvelous and seem to live quite independently of the prejudices of advertising, journalism, and the cranky academic world. Think of the books that have enjoyed independent lives. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. *Under The Volcano*. *Henderson The Rain King*. A splendid book like *Humboldt's Gift* was received with confusion and dismay but hundreds of thousands of people went out and bought hard-cover copies. The room where I work has a window looking into a wood and I like to think that these earnest, loveable and mysterious readers are in there.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think contemporary writing is becoming more specialized, more autobiographical?

CHEEVER

It may be. Autobiography and letters may be more interesting than fiction, but still, I'll stick with the novel. The novel is an acute means of communication from which all kinds of people get responses that you don't get from letters or journals.

INTERVIEWER

Did you start writing as a child?

CHEEVER

I used to tell stories. I went to a permissive school called Thayerland. I loved to tell stories and if everybody did their arithmetic—it was a very small school, probably not more than eighteen or nineteen students—then the teacher would promise that I would tell a story. I told serials. This was very shrewd of me because I knew that if I didn't finish the story

by the end of the period, which was an hour, then everyone would ask to hear the end during the next period.

INTERVIEWER

How old were you?

CHEEVER

Well, I'm inclined to lie about my age, but I suppose it was when I was eight or nine.

INTERVIEWER

You could think of a story to spin out for an hour at that age?

CHEEVER

Oh, yes. I could then. And I still do.

INTERVIEWER

What comes first, the plot?

CHEEVER

I don't work with plots. I work with intuition, apprehension, dreams, concepts. Characters and events come simultaneously to me. Plot implies narrative and a lot of crap. It is a calculated attempt to hold the reader's interest at the sacrifice of moral conviction. Of course, one doesn't want to be boring . . . one needs an element of suspense. But a good narrative is a rudimentary structure, rather like a kidney.

INTERVIEWER

Have you always been a writer, or have you had other jobs?

CHEEVER

I drove a newspaper truck once. I liked it very much, especially during the World Series when the Quincy paper would carry the box scores and full accounts. No one had radios, or television—which is not to say that the town was lit

with candles, but they used to wait for the news; it made me feel good to be the one delivering the good news. Also I spent four years in the Army. I was 17 when I sold my first story "Expelled" to *The New Republic*. *The New Yorker* started taking my stuff when I was 22. I was supported by *The New Yorker* for years and years. It has been a very pleasant association. I sent in twelve or fourteen stories a year. At the start I lived in a squalid slum room on Hudson Street with a broken window pane. I had a job at MGM with Paul Goodman doing synopses. Jim Farrell, too. We had to boil down just about every book published into either a three, five, or a twelve page précis for which you got something like five dollars. You did your own typing. And, oh, carbons.

INTERVIEWER

What was it like writing stories for *The New Yorker* in those days? Who was the fiction editor?

CHEEVER

Wolcott Gibbs was the fiction editor very briefly and then Gus Lobrano. I knew him very well; he was a fishing companion. And of course Harold Ross, who was difficult but I loved him. He asked preposterous queries on a manuscript—everyone's written about that—something like thirty-six queries on a story. The author always thought it outrageous, a violation of taste, but Ross really didn't care. He liked to show his hand, to shake the writer up. Occasionally he was brilliant. In "The Enormous Radio" he made two changes; a diamond is found on the bathroom floor after a party. The man says "Sell it, we can use a few dollars." Ross had changed "dollars" to "bucks" which was absolutely perfect. Brilliant. Then I had "the radio came softly" and Ross pencilled in another "softly." "The radio came softly, softly." He was absolutely right. But then there were twenty-nine other suggestions like, "This story has gone on for 24 hours and no one has eaten anything. There's no mention of a meal." A typical example of this sort of thing was Shirley

Jackson's "The Lottery" about the stoning ritual. He hated the story; he started turning vicious. He said there was no town in Vermont where there were rocks of that sort. He nagged and nagged and nagged. It was not surprising. Ross used to scare the hell out of me. I would go in for lunch. I never knew Ross was coming, until he'd bring in an egg cup. I'd sit with my back pressed against my chair. I was really afraid. He was a scratcher and a nosepicker, and the sort of man who could get his underwear up so there was a strip of it showing between his trousers and his shirt. He used to hop at me, sort of jump about in his chair. It was a creative, destructive relationship from which I learned a great deal, and I miss him.

INTERVIEWER

You met a lot of writers during that time, didn't you?

CHEEVER

It was all terribly important to me since I had been brought up in a small town. I was in doubt that I could make something of myself as a writer until I met two people who were very important to me: One was Gaston Lachaise and the other was E.E. Cummings. Cummings I loved and I love his memory. He did a wonderful imitation of a wood-burning locomotive going from Tifflis to Minsk. He could hear a pin falling in soft dirt at the distance of three miles. Do you remember the story of Cummings' death? It was September, hot, and Cummings was cutting kindling in the back of his house in New Hampshire. He was sixty-six or seven or something like that. Marion, his wife, leaned out the window and asked, "Cummings, isn't it frightfully hot to be chopping wood?" He said, "I'm going to stop now, but I'm going to sharpen the axe before I put it up, dear." Those were the last words he spoke. At his funeral Marianne Moore gave the eulogy. Marion Cummings had enormous eyes. You could make a place in a book with them. She smoked cigarettes as though they were heavy, and she wore a dark dress

with a cigarette hole in it.

INTERVIEWER

And Lachaise?

CHEEVER

I'm not sure what to say about him. I thought him an outstanding artist and I found him a contented man. He used to go to the Metropolitan—where he was not represented—and embrace the statues he loved.

INTERVIEWER

Did Cummings have any advice for you as a writer?

CHEEVER

Cummings was never paternal. But the cant of his head, his wind-in-the-chimney voice, his courtesy to boobs and the vastness of his love for Marion were all advisory.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever written poetry?

CHEEVER

No. It seems to me that the discipline is very different . . . another language, another continent from that of fiction. In some cases short stories are more highly disciplined than a lot of poetry that we have. Yet the disciplines are as different as shooting a twelve-gauge shotgun and swimming.

INTERVIEWER

Have magazines asked you to write journalism for them?

CHEEVER

I was asked to do an interview with Sophia Loren by the *Saturday Evening Post*. I did. I got to kiss her. I've had other offers but nothing as good.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think there's a trend for novelists to write journalism, as Norman Mailer does?

CHEEVER

I don't like your question. Fiction must compete with first-rate reporting. If you cannot write a story that is equal to a factual account of battle in the streets or demonstrations, then you can't write a story. You might as well give up. In many cases, fiction hasn't competed successfully. These days the field of fiction is littered with tales about the sensibilities of a child coming of age on a chicken farm, or a whore who strips her profession of its glamour. The *Times* has never been so full of rubbish in its recent book ads. Still, the use of the word "death" or "invalidism" about fiction diminishes as it does with anything else.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel drawn to experiment in fiction, to move toward bizarre things?

CHEEVER

Fiction *is* experimentation; when it ceases to be that, it ceases to be fiction. One never puts down a sentence without the feeling that it has never been put down before in such a way, and that perhaps even the substance of the sentence has never been felt. Every sentence is an innovation.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel that you belong to any particular tradition in American letters?

CHEEVER

No. As a matter of fact I can't think of any American writers who could be classified as part of a tradition. You certainly can't put Updike, Mailer, Ellison or Styron in a tradition. The individuality of the writer has never been as intense as it is in the United States.

INTERVIEWER

Well, would you think of yourself as a realistic writer?

CHEEVER

We have to agree on what we mean before we can talk about such definitions. Documentary novels, such as those of Dreiser, Zola, Dos Passos—even though I don't like them—can, I think, be classified as realistic. Jim Farrell was another documentary novelist; in a way, Scott Fitzgerald was, though to think of him that way diminishes what he could do best . . . which was to try to give a sense of what a very particular world was like.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think Fitzgerald was conscious of documenting?

CHEEVER

I've written something on Fitzgerald, and I've read all the biographies and critical works, and wept freely at the end of each one—cried like a baby—it is such a sad story. All the estimates of him bring in his descriptions of the '29 Crash, the excessive prosperity, the clothes, the music, and by doing so, his work is described as being heavily dated . . . sort of period pieces. This all greatly diminishes Fitzgerald at his best. One always knows reading Fitzgerald what time it is, precisely where you are, the kind of country. No writer has ever been so true in placing the scene. But I feel that this isn't pseudo-history, but his sense of being alive. All great men are scrupulously true to their times.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think your works will be similarly dated?

CHEEVER

Oh, I don't anticipate that my work will be read. That isn't

the sort of thing that concerns me. I might be forgotten tomorrow; it wouldn't disconcert me in the least.

INTERVIEWER

But a great number of your stories defy dating; they could take place anytime and almost any place.

CHEEVER

That, of course, has been my intention. The ones that you can pinpoint in an era are apt to be the worst. The bomb shelter story ("The Brigadier and the Golf Widow") is about a level of basic anxiety, and the bomb shelter, which places the story at a very particular time, is just a metaphor . . . that's what I intended anyhow.

INTERVIEWER

It was a sad story.

CHEEVER

Everyone keeps saying that about my stories, "Oh, they're so sad." My agent, Candida Donadio, called me about a new story and said, "Oh, what a beautiful story, it's so sad." I said, "All right, so I'm a sad man." The sad thing about "The Brigadier and the Golf Widow" is the woman standing looking at the bomb shelter in the end of the story and she sent away by a maid. Did you know that *The New Yorker* tried to take that out? They thought the story was much more effective without my ending. When I went in to look at page proofs, I thought there was a page missing. I asked where the end of the story was. Some girl said, "Mr. Shawn thinks it's better this way." I went into a very deep slow burn, took the train home, drank a lot of gin and got one of the editors on the telephone. I was by then loud, abusive and obscene. He was entertaining Elizabeth Bowen and Eudora Welty. He kept asking if he couldn't take this call in another place. Anyhow I returned to New York in the morning. They had reset the whole magazine—poems, newsbreaks, cartoons—and

replaced the scene.

INTERVIEWER

It's the classic story about what *The New Yorker* is rumored to do—"remove the last paragraph and you've got a typical *New Yorker* ending." What is your definition of a good editor?

CHEEVER

My definition of a good editor is a man I think charming, who sends me large checks, praises my work, my physical beauty and my sexual prowess, and who has a stranglehold on the publisher and the bank.

INTERVIEWER

What about the beginning of stories? Yours start off very quickly. It's striking.

CHEEVER

Well, if you're trying as a story-teller to establish some rapport with your reader you don't open by telling him that you have a headache and indigestion and that you picked up a gravelly rash at Jones Beach. One of the reasons is that advertising in magazines is much more common today than it was twenty to thirty years ago. In publishing in a magazine you are competing against girdle advertisements, travel advertisements, nakedness, cartoons, even poetry. The competition almost makes it hopeless. There's a stock beginning that I've always had in mind. Someone is coming back from a year in Italy on a Fulbright Scholarship. His trunk is opened in Customs and instead of his clothing and souvenirs, they find the mutilated body of an Italian seaman, everything there but the head. Another opening sentence I often think of is, "The first day I robbed Tiffany's it was raining." Of course, you can open a short story that way, but that's not how one should function with fiction. One is tempted because there has been a genuine loss of serenity, not only in the reading

public, but in all our lives. Patience, perhaps, or even the ability to concentrate. At one point when television first came in no one was publishing an article that couldn't be read during a commercial. But fiction is durable enough to survive all of this. I don't like the short story that starts out "I'm about to shoot myself," or "I'm about to shoot you." Or the Pirandello thing of "I'm going to shoot you or you are going to shoot me, or we are going to shoot someone, maybe each other." Or the erotic thing, either "He started to undo his pants, but the zipper stuck . . . he got the can of three-in-one oil . . ." and on and on we go.

INTERVIEWER

Certainly your stories have a fast pace, they move along.

CHEEVER

The first principle of aesthetics is either interest or suspense. You can't expect to communicate with anyone if you're a bore.

INTERVIEWER

William Golding wrote that there are two kinds of novelists. One lets meaning develop with the characters or situations, and the other has an idea and looks for a myth to embody it. He's an example of the second kind. He thinks of Dickens as belonging to the first. Do you think you fit into either category?

CHEEVER

I don't know what Golding is talking about. Cocteau said that writing is a force of memory that is not understood. I agree with this. Raymond Chandler described it as a direct line to the subconscious. The books that you really love give the sense, when you first open them, of having been there. It is a creation, almost like a chamber in the memory. Places that one has never been to, things that one has never seen or heard, but their fitness is so sound that you've been there somehow.

INTERVIEWER

But certainly you use a lot of resonances from myths . . . for example, references to the Bible and Greek mythology.

CHEEVER

It's explained by the fact that I was brought up in Southern Massachusetts where it was thought that mythology was a subject that we should all grasp. It was very much a part of my education. The easiest way to parse the world is through mythology. There have been thousands of papers written along those lines—Leander is Poseidon and somebody is Ceres, and so forth. It seems to be a superficial parsing. But it makes a passable paper.

INTERVIEWER

Still, you want the resonance.

CHEEVER

The resonance, of course.

INTERVIEWER

How do you work? Do you put ideas down immediately, or do you walk around with them for a while, letting them incubate?

CHEEVER

I do both. What I love is when totally disparate facts come together. For example, I was sitting in a cafe reading a letter from home with the news that a neighboring housewife had taken the lead in a nude show. As I read I could hear an Englishwoman scolding her children. "If you don't do thus and so before Mummy counts to three," was her line. A leaf fell through the air, reminding me of winter and of the fact that my wife had left me and was in Rome. There was my story. I

had an equivalently great time with the close of "Goodbye My Brother" and "The Country Husband." Hemingway and Nabokov liked these. I had everything in there: a cat wearing a hat, some naked women coming out of the sea, a dog with a shoe in his mouth and a king in golden mail riding an elephant over some mountains.

INTERVIEWER

Or ping-pong in the rain?

CHEEVER

I don't remember what story that was.

INTERVIEWER

Sometimes you played ping-pong in the rain.

CHEEVER

I probably did.

INTERVIEWER

Do you save up such things?

CHEEVER

It isn't a question of saving up. It's a question of some sort of galvanic energy. It's also, of course, a question of making sense of one's experiences.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that fiction should give lessons?

CHEEVER

No. Fiction is meant to illuminate, to explode, to refresh. I don't think there's any consecutive moral philosophy in fiction beyond excellence. Acuteness of feeling and velocity have always seemed to me terribly important. People look for morals in fiction because there has always been a confusion between fiction and philosophy.

INTERVIEWER

How do you know when a story is right? Does it hit you right the first time, or are you critical as you go along?

CHEEVER

I think there is a certain heft in fiction. For example, my latest story isn't right. I have to do the ending over again. It's a question I guess of trying to get it to correspond to a vision. There is shape, a proportion and one knows when something that happens is wrong.

INTERVIEWER

By instinct?

CHEEVER

I suppose that anyone who has written for as long as I have, it's probably what you'd call instinct. When a line falls wrong, it simply isn't right.

INTERVIEWER

You told me once you were interested in thinking up names for characters.

CHEEVER

That seems to me very important. I've written a story about men with a lot of names, all abstract, names with the fewest possible allusions: Pell, Weed, Hammer, and Nailles, of course, which was thought to be arch, but it wasn't meant to be at all. . . .

INTERVIEWER

Hammer's house appears in "The Swimmer."

CHEEVER

That's true, it's quite a good story. It was a terribly difficult story to write.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

CHEEVER

Because I couldn't ever show my hand. Night was falling, the year was dying. It wasn't a question of technical problems, but one of imponderables. When he finds it's dark and cold, it has to have happened. And, by God, it did happen. I felt dark and cold for some time after I finished that story. As a matter of fact, it's one of the last stories I wrote for a long time, because then I started on *Bullet Park*. Sometimes the easiest seeming stories to a reader are the hardest kind to write.

INTERVIEWER

How long does it take you to write such a story?

CHEEVER

Three days, three weeks, three months. I seldom read my own work. It seems to be a particularly offensive form of narcissism. It's like playing back tapes of your own conversation. It's like looking over your shoulder to see where you've run. That's why I've often used the image of the swimmer, the runner, the jumper. The point is to finish and go on to the next thing. I also feel, not as strongly as I used to, that if I looked over my shoulder I would die. I think frequently of Satchel Paige and his warning that you might see something gaining on you.

INTERVIEWER

Are there stories that you feel particularly good about when you are finished?

CHEEVER

Yes, there were about fifteen of them that were absolutely BANG! I loved them, I loved everybody—the buildings, the houses, wherever I was. It was a great sensation. Most of these

were stories written in the space of three days and which run to about thirty-five pages. I love them, but I can't read them; in many cases, I wouldn't love them any longer if I did.

INTERVIEWER

Recently you have talked bluntly about having a writer's block, which had never happened to you before. How do you feel about it now?

CHEEVER

Any memory of pain is deeply buried and there is nothing more painful for a writer than an inability to work.

INTERVIEWER

Four years is a rather long haul on a novel, isn't it?

CHEEVER

It's about what it usually takes. There's a certain monotony in this way of life, which I can very easily change.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

CHEEVER

Because it doesn't seem to me the proper function of writing. If possible, it is to enlarge people. To give them their risk, if possible to give them their divinity, not to cut them down.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel that you had diminished them too far in *Bullet Park*?

CHEEVER

No I didn't feel that. But I believe that it was understood in those terms. I believe that Hammer and Nailles were thought to be social casualties, which isn't what I intended at

all. And I thought I made my intentions quite clear. But if you don't communicate, it's not anybody else's fault. Neither Hammer nor Nailles were meant to be either psychiatric or social metaphors; they were meant to be two men with their own risks. I think the book was misunderstood on those terms. But then I don't read reviews, so I don't really know what goes on.

INTERVIEWER

How do you know when the literary work is finished to your satisfaction?

CHEEVER

I have never completed anything in my life to my absolute and lasting satisfaction.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel that you're putting a lot of yourself on the line when you are writing?

CHEEVER

Oh yes, oh yes! When I speak as a writer I speak with my own voice—quite as unique as my fingerprints—and I take the maximum risk at seeming profound or foolish.

INTERVIEWER

Does one get the feeling while sitting at the typewriter that one is godlike, or creating the whole show at once?

CHEEVER

No, I've never felt godlike. No, the sense is of one's total usefulness. We all have a power of control, it's part of our lives: we have it in love, in work that we love doing. It's a sense of ecstasy, as simple as that. The sense is that "this is my usefulness, and I can do it all the way through." It always leaves you feeling great. In short, you've made sense of your life.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel that way during or after the event? Isn't work, well, work?

CHEEVER

I've had very little drudgery in my life. When I write a story that I really like, it's . . . why, wonderful. That is what I can do and I love it while I'm doing it. I can feel that it's good. I'll say to Mary and the children, "All right, I'm off, leave me alone. I'll be through in three days."

—ANNETTE GRANT

Three Poems by David Bergman

URBAN ECOLOGY

One morning I awoke
to a dead pigeon on the roof
of the building next to mine,
right under the window where I eat.
I phoned the landlord of the building
and asked him to remove it.
“I’ll look into it,” he said.
The next day it disappeared
under some new-fallen snow,
its feet like miniature TV antennas
the only sign it still was there.
After two days it re-emerged.
Now they’ll pick it up, I thought.
The bird stared back at me,
stunned and unbelieving.
After a few days I called the man back.
“I’ll look into it,” he said.
All winter it lay there.
In the spring, when it defrosted
the flies gathered around
like a surgical team.
Each bore his sample of tissue
away to his laboratory.
Next came the worms who
carefully examined the carcass
from the inside out.
By then, the landlord was hanging up
whenever he heard my voice.
But yesterday the pigeon
finally disappeared.
A dead cat has taken its place.

IN THE COUNTRY

If I lived in the country I would own a dog.
You don't have to walk them there; you just
open the door and they do their business.
Then if you do walk them, you don't have to worry
about being mugged, like my mother's friend
who lives in the eighties on the West Side
and was pushed in an alley, a shiny stiletto
brought to her throat, the husky voice saying
that all he wanted was the dog
which she watched as it was repeatedly mounted,
the jaws held tight by a make-shift muzzle.

In the city, we treat dogs like children.
Their bowel movements are public knowledge.
In the country, a dog is as free as a roach
and just as nocturnal. In the country,
they remind us how we are human.
In the country, they smell without giving offense.
In the country, they are less likely to eat their pups.

THE ARTIST IS NO PHYSICIAN

—for Cal Schumann

“The figure should be natural and relaxed,”
asserted Mucha to his drawing class,
but didn't tell that he bent the Job girl's fingers
back into a knuckle-breaking arabesque
and thereby crossed her smile with a wince,
or how his son complained of feeling deformed
after sitting for his father. The truth is
that beauty pursued from a single angle
has never added to a person's comfort.

BOTTLES

It isn't easy. We work
without a goal. We have never followed
directions. Splicing together
parts of remembered things. No maps
as guides. Yesterday I made a list
of all the poems I'd written. The total was
375. I eliminated
the failures and the ones I didn't trust.
About half. Today I worked at
pricing my large bottle collection.

Next week I will sell them. Who wants to keep
all this crap. I never wanted to be
a bottle collector. I like digging them up.
All one needs is a spade. I have 754 bottles.
Get rid of possessions. It's hard
to care enough. I hope I can keep on
caring until next week so I can sell them.
I need the money.

No one knows what a poem is anymore.
Reading someone's poetry I think
I can do that too.
In a bottle you can trace
a people's history. You tell how old it is
by the seams running up the sides.
I can't find the definition for a poem.
Bottles are memories. Lea & Perrins Worcestershire
with a glass stopper. Was it green glass or clear
the way I remember it.

In first grade in Springfield Illinois
my teacher took me home for lunch. We ate
in her backyard under the trees.
At the end she offered me
malted milk tablets from a brown bottle.
Last fall in Great Neck New York
when I was digging a hole to plant my daffodils
I found a bottle labeled
Horlicks Malted Milk.
The first bottle I found on Squam Road
in Nantucket Massachusetts was a blue
Phillips Milk of Magnesia. Blues
are my favorite. It's hard for me
to put them up for sale.

Two Poems by Don Bogen

LEARNING TO CLAM

On the cold coast west out of Hoquiam
I'm a stalker with a short-handled gun,
looking for dimples in damp sand to scoop out
and slosh in. Clamming is watching,
your close friend said, as we raced here under
a rising fog. But my own clam-eye's
unfocussed like a baby's, and the dawn-gray beach
gets littered with caved-in holes until
I learn to see under sand.

That strange tug
of life and then release as the numb hand
pulls the razored shell through a suck of mud,
after three hours it almost becomes
familiar. The backs of my shoulders remember
the bite of that bent-up shovel, my palms
are marked with the grain of its handle.
The gritty catch clatters in our bags
all the long way back.

In the barn-like
kitchen we learn to slice off guts, wash
the ribbony innards in the sink. A bucket
fills with brittle hunks of shell, clean parts
plop in a mixing bowl. Dipped in flour now,
the milk-colored meat is turning gold in oil.
I catch a whiff of ocean off the pan. Clam
steam fogs up all the windows, enclosing us
like memory.

CRAWLING HOME

At the end of the nineteenth century
things got wiggly.
You tried to make photographs and the camera wiggled.
The dancers looked fuzzy, half-haloed.
You noticed the cast iron railing
you were leaning on wiggled too.
Strands of smoke from your Gauloises
writhed up and twined in the air.
When you went outside to paint what you saw,
what you saw was wiggly light.

And people in wiggly light,
chatting, strolling, rowing in a shimmering park.
Taffeta ruffles, hat ribbons, velvet bow ties
wiggled at you in a breeze that was always there.
Black caterpillars squirmed under noses.
Spit curls wormed down from hairlines.
Half-naked Isadora Duncan
did her snake dance,
while the graying heir apparent to the Austro-Hungarian
Empire
made his most gracious bow.

A bullet sliced clean through the delicate
ripples of skin round his throat.
He twitched, died, went stiff as a brick,
and got buried in an eight-foot velvet box.
Meanwhile frock-coated diplomats chopped
the still air. Fresh troughs terraced
hillsides, cutting the plains into squares.
Crosses were already jutting up behind the fronts
when you began to crawl from trench to trench
slowly, in a straight line.

John Allman

THE COLOR OF NEVILLE BRAND'S FRONT TEETH

It begins in the back of the head,
gathering force like the strangler's
mop in Slam sweeping across the floor.
It changes shape like Willie's
sharpened spoon. You can feel it
between the ribs, it has traveled so
far in so short a time: like emotion
after a month on tranquilizers,
like a calendar nude to the guy
in solitary. At first, it seems
colorless as Louie's narrow hands
that could knit doilies or pick
pockets. It's bruised from the last
kidnapping. It seems to be weeping
in your viscera, under the lights,
denying everything. But give it
a break like the Puerto Rican kid
whose only fault was English,
it'll speak in tongues; it'll
rush to your palate like salt.
It's the kind of rage the toothless
bandits felt when they shot off
Gary Cooper's big left toe and he
still wouldn't talk. By the time
it's in your molars it's too late:
no good glossing it with Pearl Drops
or prayer. It's so much there,
you taste it biting into plums,
beef-steak tomatoes, your cell-mate's
arm.

Three Poems by Tom Wayman

KITCHEN POEM

I put the bacon into the pan.
It lies there, lank and perfectly relaxed.
After a few minutes, though, a marvelous transformation
starts: the bacon begins to whisper, then hiss,
sinks down, becomes transparent, bubbles and snaps
and babbles to itself, turning crinkled and brown and stiff.

Meantime, I cut up some mushrooms.
The knife blade enters the soft puffy white flesh.
What is a mushroom: a fruit? a vegetable?
Inside the cap, as half the mushroom falls away
gills and a tiny breathing space are revealed—
a secret maritime connection: earth-fish, land-anemone
alive on the ocean of the mossy forest floor.
As the mushroom slices are added to the intense heat of the pan
each one dries out and appears as a miniature kippered
herring.

Now I drop in the eggs. Two circular wonders.
The clear fluid becomes white and solid
as the yolk builds its own bright dome in the snow.
Personally, I like to put a lid on it all
so the white covers the yolk entirely.

Food is where everything starts. A thin slice of cheese
melting on my tongue. And I *have* to
talk about salads. Water
fleshed into green crisp ragged wafers:
lettuce leaves torn up and put in a wooden bowl.
With sliced celery stalks: one piece crunching

between my teeth as I work. Tangy radish:
a red warning sign of a coat, and below that
an apparently-calm, deceptive interior. Not like a tomato
which is honestly red and juicy all the way through.
Green peppers are even more deceiving:
really you just eat the rind because that's all there is.
To me, peppers seem a little embarrassed when they are cut
open.
They have spent so much time attempting to look like an
apple
that once they are exposed they try to vanish underneath
everything else in the salad.

Avocados. Warm green California memories
shipped all this way for me: a fruit
with a pudding inside, sweet, bland and mushy,
the absolute opposite of carrots
which are delicious edible wood,
staunch and starchy, each carrot disk
slipping off the knife. I pick one out to munch on:
aaaaahh.

Then I put my wooden fork and spoon in
and stir the whole pile up. I pour
an oily and vinegary dressing on, slippery and
pungent with spices. Out of the water
and the ground it all comes, to my plate and my fork
and into my mouth.

I eat. Taking the planet as a whole
not very many can do that. Luck
has brought me this food, though something harsher than luck
keeps the others away from the table.
I eat and go on talking.
Others who can't eat, or who can't eat so much
meanwhile are thinking of something else to say.

But still I love to eat, as a person should.
This is how I know there is something wrong
with those who keep food from the poor.
I think if the vegetables controlled the world
there would be enough for all, since even a vegetable
knows its duty is to feed the earth. Something lower than that
must have its hands on things: some sickness
that decrees some people will eat and not others.

Yet food has its own revenge.
Hugo Blanco says that in Chile, under the generals,
when every form of resistance was mercilessly stopped,
the men with the guns had to allow
people to buy food and cook together
since conditions under military rule made this necessary
if many people were going to eat at all.
Now for this activity you need some sort of organization
Blanco says, and you can't stop people talking to each other
while they're stirring up the soup. And they don't
Blanco says, always talk about food.
See how sneaky eating is? I think if you want to control
human beings, you really have to keep every bit of nourishment
away from them. For if someone once opens his mouth to eat,
who knows? instead of rice going in
a word might come out.

Myself, I go on eating, as I go on breathing.
But I hope these two acts are all that ties me in this life
to those men and women who for now decide who starves.

THE UNIVERSITY

The university is moored to the town
at the edge of a river:
high up in the administration tower
the president, a captain on his bridge,
meets each day with his executives
to decide where the ship is headed.
Meanwhile below decks
in the classrooms and lecture halls,
the laboratory seminars, coffee lounges
and small office-staterooms of the faculty
others also are considering
where the vessel should steam.
The professors with their words,
the secretaries with their papers
and the service people with their labor
all turn the great propellers that drive this boat.
But as the lecturers speak
explaining everything hourly to the blackboards
each is convinced he or she is also helping to steer
past certain treacherous winds and currents.

The students flow through the buildings twice each day
like tidal water filling and draining an old hulk.
They are like a mysterious migration of sea-crabs
swarming onto a drowned wreck and covering it
with their waving claws and tentacles.
Then, late in the afternoon,
responding to a change of temperature in the water

caused by the swirl of a distant thermal layer
which alters the quantity of microscopic plankton in the area
which in turn affects each step of the food chain
eventually including themselves, the crabs move off again
and disappear up the sea-bed
leaving the bones of the dead ship alone with the ocean.

But each student when on board
knows where the ship is taking him
or her. They know what neither the president
nor his officers, the faculty
nor the secretaries are sure of:
where the vessel is going. What few understand
is that the ship is moored to the town:
it is sailing where the town is sailing.
Should anyone want to go someplace else
we will have to find a way
to get the town into the water.

TRANSPORT

One morning, Wayman's car is gone. After a minute
Wayman remembers he did drive it back last night
and, yes, left it here in front of the building. Wayman
walks over
and looks at the empty parking space. He bends down
to examine the oil on the asphalt.

Nobody Wayman talks to saw anything suspicious.
Wayman picks up the phone to dial the police
careful to use the number for routine matters.
Missing car? One moment, the police station says.
And then, is a deeper voice: *Police. Emergency.*
"Uh," Wayman says, "I think my car has been stolen."
Well, the voice demands, has it been stolen
or hasn't it? "I guess it has," Wayman says.
Okay, the voice says, *in that case I'll fill out a form.*

And after giving the details, Wayman inquires politely
if he should phone back in a day or so to see if the car has
been found.
You can if you like, he is told. *But I wouldn't if I were you.*
If we find it, we'll let you know.

And that was that. In the following days
Wayman resolved more than once to scour the neighborhood
in case his car had just been taken for a short joyride.
But each time Wayman heads downstairs
intending to get into his machine and go search for it
he realizes again: no car. And a few blocks on foot
teach him he now lives in an enormous district.

As well, every arrangement to meet some people at the pub,
each former dash to a movie at the last minute,
now has to be organized: he must leave at a precise instant
in order to be out at the corner on time to wait for a
certain bus.

So, squeezed into the back of the public vehicle
as it lumbers hissing from block to block, moving vaguely
downtown,
Wayman starts to dream of the day, months from this, when
after weeks of failing to spot his car out a dusty bus window
and also never discovering it abandoned in any City
parking lot,
Wayman can slide behind a strange steering wheel
and begin once more that process
of anxiety, expensive maintenance, and eventual
mechanical collapse
which will transform another automobile
—at least for as long as Wayman has it—
into Wayman's car.

Richard Shelton

ONE MAN'S MEAT

1956: She is the girl with the biggest breasts in Sloan, Iowa. She will take a backseat to no one. He is young and handsome. All summer he fondles her breasts in the front seat. Sometimes she rests her fingers on the round knob

of the gearshift. 1957: After the wedding they live in a white house. She suspects he is colorless. One day, while she is shopping, he paints the house green.

She says it is garish. 1960: She decides he lacks polish. For his birthday she gives him sandpaper. He uses it, hoping to please her. When his face bleeds, she says he lacks character. He drinks to ease the pain. She says he is going to the dogs. To avoid it, he drinks alone.

1963: His face has healed but is scarred. She says he is hideous; he should take care of himself. She suggests a diet, exercise, vitamins. He prefers alcohol,

loneliness, pain. 1965: She tells him he neglects her. She threatens to take a lover. The next day he brings home a friend. She and the friend become lovers. After three months the friend kills her and goes to the mountains of Peru. The husband is convicted of murder and goes to prison, where he is almost happy.

1975: But the mountains of Peru are very high. The friend has a heart attack and dies. Before he dies, he confesses to the murder. The husband is released

from prison. 1976: His hair is beginning to gray, but in spite of the scars he is still handsome. He takes a job driving a truck and meets a waitress in a truck stop. She is a grass widow with the biggest breasts in Enid, Oklahoma. She will take a backseat to no one.

Philip Legler

BACK TO EARTH

"Then the farmer slowly settled back to earth. 'Once I'm in the air . . . I'm unable to change my position. I get there by will power'."

—Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain.

Once upon a time
in the village of Stara
Zagora, Mikhail Drogzenovich,
a poor farmer, was known to
"lift himself off the ground
without any visible
means of support."
They called him the "hovering farmer."
I see him there in front of
the townspeople, witnesses,
sitting on the ground by his farmhouse.

Much like a wizard
he does this all by himself,
as if it's a trick, an illusion,
Houdini with his mirrors,
Mikhail rising, proving
levitation, Lozanov's
photographs of
yogis. Some four feet above the land,
using his mind, a jet pack,
he hovers there by will power;
then like a body in a casket
settles back to earth.
In Leningrad scientists

all say they have never heard of him:
fairy tales, they mutter as the news spreads,
the children bring home from school.

Sometimes I daydream
that if we touched in the woods
we'd float, hover for days in the sky,
balloonists in our basket
crossing the Atlantic,
the world awaiting the news,
the bulletins;
ships below would keep watch, radio
our position: LAST SEEN AT
4000 FEET, HEADED FOR
THE COAST OF FRANCE. Or maybe we'd fly
to Bulgaria
until a storm brought us down,
the end of this story. Then no one
could track our bread crumbs on radar, no one
call the king—around the world.

bedtime stories told,
people minding their business,
ships in the ocean viewing TV
or full-page spreads in *Penthouse*.
There would be no landing
seen at night by a farmhouse,
no one to say
where we landed, if the grass felt warm
and the heavy earth seemed to
support us like the balloon.

Selective Service

David Evanier

Even when I ran into Grinaldi, my psychiatrist, seated on a bench with a pigeon on his head in Washington Square Park, or eating dinner in Bickford's among the old men who lived in single rooms, he had an air of calm and certainty that reassured me. I saw him as a rebel. His phone number was unlisted and he was afraid of the authorities. He had no license to practice, but none was technically required. His psychiatric magazines were filched for him by friends and patients from libraries and medical waiting rooms. His life was a thin thread, but he carried it off.

I was almost eighteen. The draft board was breathing down my neck.

"When I came to this country from Sicily," he told me during a session, "I ate out of garbage cans to keep alive. When the Communists and the Jews tell me that man is basically good, I have to laugh—"

"The Jews," I said. "Did you say the Jews?" My heart was pounding. Grinaldi's face flushed and then he laughed, "Yes,

the Jews.”

“I’m Jewish—I mean I’m not in a religious sense, I’m a pacifist and a socialist—but . . . I’m Jewish.”

“Yes, I know, Bruce.”

“You’re not anti-Semitic?”

Grinaldi laughed and shook his head. “Jesus,” he said.

“What does that mean?”

“Take it easy, Bruce. A great many Communists are Jews. Everybody knows that. I’m stating facts. Ethel and Julius Rosenberg—”

“*Are you in favor of capital punishment?*” I stood up.

“God damn it,” he shouted, “will you get off your high horse, please? Just sit down and listen for a minute. You, Bruce, *do not hear, do not see*. You, Bruce Orav, argue and negate. You have the answers to everyone else’s problems but not your own. In short, Professor, A for intellect, Zero for belief.”

“True, but you’re changing the subject—”

“I am not changing the subject. You said you were a pacifist—”

“Yes, I am—”

“Sure, and I’m a horse’s ass. What are you going to do about the Army?”

“I’m not going!” I screamed. “Not in a thousand years!”

He popped two ice cubes into his scotch and downed it. He stared at me with a smile. “You don’t want to be a soldier?”

“NO!”

He smiled. “I think you’d make an excellent soldier. In fact, you’d make a terrific commanding officer.” He spoke slowly, and he leered at me.

“What—what the hell are you talking about? I’m non-violent—”

“You’re what?”

“Non-violent! I believe in peace!”

He drew out each word. “Oh no you’re not. You’re boiling. You take all that anger with you on the battlefield, Bruce and you’ll be a credit to Uncle Sam.”

“You son-of-a-bitch,” I said.

“Hey,” he laughed. “Hey, listen to that! Do you hear yourself?”

“So what?”

“Your voice! The resonance and tonal quality! Usually you sound like a weak sister! Why can’t you always make it forceful like that?”

My head was spinning. “I can’t follow you, I can’t follow you—”

“Bruce,” he said, “do you believe your mother is basically good?”

“That bitch! I could slit her throat!”

“Oh?”

“My mother is one per cent of the world.”

“I rest my case,” he said.

“Anyway, I don’t want to get killed . . .”

“Oh well, why didn’t you say so?”

“Because it’s more complex than that.”

“Sure it is. Have a drink, Bruce. Won’t hurt ya. You got a lot to learn, Bruce. You want it all nice. You and F.D.R. and the fags and Adlai.”

Selective Service. All the school counselors, the advisors, the neighbors, the shrinks, would say soothingly, “After you finish your stint in the Service—”

“What do you mean, after—” I wanted to scream—“I won’t be alive after!”

I carried my Selective Service letter in my jacket pocket. A long white envelope, it contained my 1-A classification. I did not know how to get rid of it. I was afraid that my Communist connections would become known to the draft board and that they would induct me immediately out of revenge. I couldn’t leave the letter in my room. One of my enemies might enter when I was out, find the letter, and inform the board of my Communism. I was afraid, too, the letter might fall out of my pocket at a demonstration and be picked up by the F.B.I. who policed the picket lines.

I lit a match to the letter in the kitchen sink.

I placed the ashes in my pocket and walked around with them.

I went out one midnight and, when no one was looking, emptied the ashes from my pocket into the grate in the street. I looked around angrily at the suspicious types who might be watching. My God, I thought, there is really something wrong with me. But I felt better about the ashes.

But then I wondered if the draft board tapped my room. I talked aloud to myself all the time.

I began to whisper in the room. Damn it, it was hard not to talk aloud. I moved my lips silently and the words struggled to get out.

I paced around my room. I clicked my teeth shut on a word. I slammed my fist against the wall. The annual civil defense drill was coming up Thursday. The sirens would sound, the streets would be cleared. Every year the *Catholic Worker* crowd—Dorothy Day, Ammon Hennacy—got their names in the paper as they were carried off from Battery Park protesting. Thursday was the day. If I took part, the draft board would be convinced of my sincerity as a pacifist. I would be on TV and in the *New York Times*. But I would have a jail record. What if I trembled in front of the cameras? What if they placed me in a cell and took away my glasses? I wouldn't be able to read. What if the TV reporters asked me for a statement and I was unable to speak? Confrontations always made my heart pound and reduced my words to gibberish. I might forget I was a pacifist and scream "Fuck capitalism" or "Free Sacco and Vanzetti" in my confusion. What if a guard hit me? If I was a pacifist, I couldn't hit back. Or what if he really hurt me? They could do anything they wanted to you in jail and call it an accident. One day at a Communist rally, I had meant to tell the comrades that I was going to the bathroom. Instead I said I was going "backstage." They had stared at me. I was so befuddled I broke out in a sweat.

I sat down on my cot and tried to read *Esquire* and tossed it aside. Time to read the *National Guardian*, article by article,

to deepen my Marxism. Oh shit, why was it so boring, so deadly, why was each paragraph torture? How could people with a vision of paradise sound like a machine cranking along a parched road? Anna Louise Strong writing about being released after years in a Communist Chinese prison—how pleased, how proud she was that the Socialist system proved its virtue by releasing her! Anna Louise, all smiles, in her maidenly dress, New England glasses, grateful for imprisonment and for release. Was she guilty—yes and no. Yes when they jailed her, no now that she was out. Whatever they said was fine. Let's see, who's been expelled from the American C.P.? Oh, Nat Binder, the visionary working class leader as of last Thursday, now a vermin, an agent of imperialism, a capitalist stooge. I had always thought he was a creep. Oh Kumar Goshal, fuck you, oh Cedric Belfrage, why are you people so hard to like? You're supposed to be saints, God damn it, and you're not even passable.

I thought of my father's face when he would hear of the arrest. Now he would know I was serious, that I wasn't kidding, that I wasn't afraid of my shadow like him. But I would need a pair of jeans and a workshirt to get arrested in, wearing a suit would look ridiculous. Oh Christ, where would I get the money to buy the jeans? I had spent my weekly allowance already. I would have to call my father and plead with him, and he would be suspicious. He always wanted me to wear a suit and a tie so that I could find a good job.

I was called to the phone in the hallway. "DON'T DO IT, BRUCE—"

"What?" It was Grinaldi.

"You heard me."

"I don't know what you're talking about—"

"Don't do it, Bruce—"

"What are you talking about?"

"Thursday."

"Thursday?"

"Thursday."

"But how do you know about Thursday?" I had to admire

the bastard, although I felt weak. I had never said a word to him.

I held on to the wall. "I don't know what—" "Shut up," Grinaldi said, and clicked off.

I had a part-time job at a Communist bookstore in Queens. Thursday was a working day, and when I got to the store I felt relieved. It was far from Battery Park. I knew I was safe.

The owner of the store, Harry Stemm, had bulging eyes, and urged me to join the Party, burn something, bomb something.

When I came in the door, Harry put down the books he was marking. "Tsk, ts, tsk," he shook his head. "So you're not going through with it? I was hoping not to see you today."

"I'm sorry, Harry." I searched for the words that would satisfy him. "I wasn't sure politically it was the right tactic."

"Hmmm," Harry said, "perhaps you're right." He was happy to see I had made my decision on political grounds.

The phone rang. Harry picked up the phone and looked puzzled. "Guy wants to talk to you. Sounds like a ruffian."

"DON'T DO IT, BRUCE—"

"I'm in Queens, for Christ's sake, at my job—"

"Okay, Bruce. Don't let that Commie sell you a bill of goods."

"I won't." I said goodbye.

Harry stared at me suspiciously. "Who was that?" he said.

"My therapist."

"Progressive?"

"Very."

At that moment, a girl I had never seen before came into the store. She was dark and pretty, her name was Angela, and she was looking for *Look Homeward, Angel*.

Suddenly she said, "God, I feel guilty about today. I wanted to take part in the civil defense protest, and my parents wouldn't let me."

Harry looked up. "Oh ho! Listen to that! Young lady,

Bruce here had the very same idea!”

“You’re kidding!” she said.

We all burst out laughing. Harry was beside himself, doing a little dance around us.

“I would really have liked to,” I said, “but it’s too late now. Here we are all the way out in Queens—”

“What’s wrong with Queens?” said Harry.

“It’s an hour from Battery Park,” I said.

“So who says you have to do it in Battery Park? You’ll be the first to take a stand in Queens!”

And we’ll be carted off to jail, I thought, with no press, no TV, no nothing.

Angela looked at me. Her eyes were warm.

“This is really amazing,” she said, and she and Harry burst out laughing again.

The air raid sirens began whining.

“I don’t believe this,” she said. She stared at me.

Harry gave me a push, a twinkle in his eye. “So?” he said.

“I’m going out there!” Angela suddenly said, and marched out into the deserted street.

I stood still for a moment.

I rushed out after her.

“Aren’t you coming?” I called to Harry.

“No, I have to watch the store. I’ll see you on TV.”

Angela and I walked along the sidewalk. Policemen passed us, told us the drill was starting, and kept walking. A few people shouted at us to get off the sidewalk, but no one stopped us. Finally we walked out onto the street to attract more attention.

When a policeman finally stopped us, we had to explain what we were doing. I wasn’t too clear. “Being as this is a day of drilling,” I began, “that is, in preparation for—”

Angela interrupted me. “We’re protesting the civil defense drill.”

“Oh,” the policeman said. “Well, you kids will have to go inside—”

“We refuse,” Angela said. I shook my head in total agreement.

"You want me . . . to arrest you?"

We said yes. "Really?" he said. "Well, okay."

He said to me, "You seem awfully nervous. Are you all right?"

"Perfectly!" I replied.

At the jail, I was separated from Angela, and I crumpled to the floor. I was not protesting, I was just unable to move. They picked me up and carried me to my cell. They asked me if there was anyone I wanted to call. I gave them Grinaldi's phone number.

They told me that Grinaldi hung up on them, and I gave them my father's number.

I was afraid my chest was going to explode. I was unable to get up, and they brought my food to me.

When my father came, he paid for my bail, and, with the aid of a policeman, carried me to his car.

I felt better the next morning, and rushed out to buy the *New York Times*. There was a large picture of Dorothy Day and Ammon Hennacy on the front page. At the end of the story, there was the news that two young protesters had been arrested in Queens. No names were given.

Trial was set for the following week.

I called Grinaldi on the phone.

"Yeah?" he said.

"It's me, Bruce."

"I know it's you, Bruce. How did they get my phone number?" he said furiously.

"I wanted you to know—"

"You gave them my phone number—how dare you?"

"But, you're my therapist!"

"Listen, Bruce, I'm not anything to you. Don't get me involved in this bullshit. I told them I didn't know you!"

I almost broke out crying. "I'm sorry, Marius, you're the one friend . . ."

There was a long pause. Grinaldi sighed heavily. "Oh Jesus, Jesus Christ. What did you have to go and fuck up for, Bruce? I warned you, didn't I?"

"I did the right thing! To protest against nuclear warfare and Hiroshima and the killing of millions of innocent people is the right thing and you goddamn well know it!"

He sighed. "Keep regressing, Bruce, and you'll be permanently fixated at the oral-anal stage of the puberty circle."

"And the girl felt the same way!" I said, gasping for air.

"Say that again."

"I said the girl felt the same way!"

"What girl?"

"Angela Goldberg!"

"Which masochist are you talking about? I don't remember an Angela—"

"I only met her that day!"

"What?"

"I met her at the bookstore!"

He whistled. "Ohhh . . ."

"We did it together—"

"I get it." A warm note crept into his voice. "Well, Bruce, you didn't mention a girl—" His voice became merry, he laughed.

"Now I get it. Bruce, why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you what?" I said, confused at the switch but relieved at his friendliness.

"Cunt."

"Wunt?"

Laughter surged across the wires at me.

"You can't stay away from it, can you, young man?"

"That has absolutely nothing to do with it!" I said angrily.

"I didn't touch her!"

He sighed. "Well, hurry up! And come see me when you're out of jail. You've made me happy, Bruce. G'bye, Papa." He hung up.

My lawyer was late for the hearing. I stood with my father before the judge, and Angela stood with her parents and her lawyer. Her parents looked balefully at me; they wanted Angela to say that I had made her do it against her will. She had refused.

My heartbeats were so loud I was sure I would not be able to hear what the judge said. I heard nothing. I might get a month in jail. How did I get myself into such a mess? Pacifism, communism (which one was it, anyway, I tried to remember)—they were far away. A member of Pacifist International had come by to cheer us up, and I heard him as if he were speaking from across the street to me. He was tall and blond, with a blatant Irish name. You're a cold bastard, I thought, an anti-Semite at heart, with the biggest adam's apple in God's green world. You don't give a shit about me, and if you did, you would get me out of this; I might go to jail. Angela wouldn't talk to me. If she only would, it would be all right. She acted as if it had all been an aberration. Her parents surrounded her, shaking their fists at me. But she wouldn't even betray me. That, somehow, made it worse. She wasn't a fink, but she didn't love me. My father held my hand, and I shook it off, afraid Angela would see.

We stood around, waiting for my lawyer. "Is your lawyer here?" my father said.

"I don't know. I think I would recognize him, but I'm not sure."

"Oh, my God," my father moaned. He buried his face in his hands, as someone had called "Here I am, Judge!" A short, squat black man with the face of an aging squirrel, thick lips and heavy horn-rimmed glasses came smiling down the aisle carrying a pile of law books. It was my lawyer, Conrad Collins. "*Where did you get a Negro?*" my father whispered out loud, his face ashen. "You're trying to destroy me, aren't you?" he said, shaking his head, and making shrugging motions with his shoulders to the judge as if asking his forgiveness that his son was so disturbed that he would resort to this.

Conrad Collins grinned at me and at the judge. He apologized to the judge for his lateness.

The judge said it was an open and shut case, but that he would consider suspending sentence if I would promise never to do it again.

"Oh my, no," Collins said, smiling. "Your Honor, this young man would not in good conscience promise that. He considers what he did an act of good faith and moral conscience, an act of defiance of the vicious capitalist war machine that is trampling the freedom-loving peoples of all nations—"

My father gurgled.

"All right, all right, never mind," the judge said. "I'll pronounce sentence then—"

"If you don't mind, sir, I am sure that Bruce would like to make a statement at this time, as a pacifist, as an enemy of the heinous war—"

No, no, no, no, please, I wouldn't know what to say, I'm a leaf, a pebble, a feather, a pulsing heartbeat, that's all I am, I don't know why I'm here, I just want to go home—

"Never mind all that," the judge said. "I don't want to hear what he's got to say."

I remembered to look angry, muffled and offended. The relief was so great that I could think more clearly. I looked around and stood up straighter.

"Inasmuch as this is a felony," the judge began, "I must—"

"Uh uh uh!" Collins said, pointing a finger in the air. "Excuse me, Your Honor, this is not a felony. If I may, may I cite, excuse me, let me find it—" Collins had taken his books in his arms and was thumbing through the pages of one of them, sticking his finger in his mouth to moisten it so that he could turn the pages more quickly. The judge looked annoyed, but waited.

"May I cite—" Collins cited page and reference. The judge grunted and asked to see it. Collins stood on his toes, smiling, and handed up the book.

The judge read. "You're right. Misdemeanor."

I had no idea what they were talking about, although I sensed that something was happening.

The judge pronounced sentence. "Twenty-five dollars or ten days in jail."

My father rushed up to Collins to thank him and asked him what his fee was.

Collins patted him on the back. "No charge; it's an honor. Your son is a hero, Mr. Orav." Collins told me to call him sometime, shook hands with my father and me, and scooted off.

I looked for Angela. She nodded coldly, and walked off with her parents.

I went to see Collins at his office to talk about evading the draft. I had heard many stories about him: that he shipped guns to Cuba, that he had been in jail himself during World War Two as a Trotskyite because he refused to fight in a capitalist war.

"I'm afraid my connections to the Communist Party will get me in trouble when I claim I'm a pacifist," I told him.

"What you gotta do, Bruce, is get into one of the far-out numbers. The C.P., that's run by the F.B.I., so the draft board ain't scared of that shit, no way. In the old days I'd tell you to join the Trots, but they're class collaborators now too. No, you gotta join somethin' crazy, if you know what I mean. Selective Service gotta be *scared* of you. Like Progressive Labor. The draft don't mess with those guys." Radical papers and books were scattered all over Collins' desk. He held up a copy of the Progressive Labor newspaper. A slogan in big black letters said: "CASTRATE CAPITALISM." Collins laughed, his white teeth shining.

"Wait a minute, something even better." He riffled through the pile and held up a four-page sheet called "*Proletarian World*." There was a poem beneath the masthead:

*Black and White,
Get Your Machetes Together, Brothers!
Unite and Fight for a Proletarian World.*

"It's a family, just a husband, wife and daughter, Bruce. You call up, see, spell out your name slowly and clearly so the F.B.I. gets it right on the tap, make sure PW puts you on

their mailing list. That's very important, in case the F.B.I. misses your call or fucks up somehow. Have a money order made out for a dollar with your signature on it, and mail it to them. The F.B.I. and the C.I.A. will open the letter.

"The PW—Vince Piker is his name—he won't bother you much. He's harmless. Meanwhile you can keep your C.P. connections, nobody will know the difference."

Collins stood at the door, umbrella in his hand. "Gotta run, Bruce."

I decided to deliver my dollar money order in person at the offices of *Proletarian World*, the day after I made the telephone call in which I carefully spelled out my name.

The Piker family lived in a run-down apartment on Ninth Avenue and 20th Street. When I rang the bell, Vince Piker called down, "Is that Bruce Orav down there?"

"How did you know?"

He came bounding down the steps and put his arms around me. A red-faced, friendly man, he seemed saturated with alcohol.

"*How did I know?*" he said. "We've been talking about you all day! Come on up and meet the other comrades."

His wife and daughter were seated in the living room. The daughter was cute. "The way you called up, unafraid, ready to step forward in the name of the revolution, so positive-sounding. And now that I see you, what a hot little Red you are! This is my wife Sophie Cannelone, and my daughter Iris Callaghan. She heads the youth and women's cavalry division."

The phone rang. When he returned, Vince said, "Guess who that was? Conrad Collins, and he was calling about you! I told him you were here, and he was delighted. Told me about your civil defense trial—excellent class action. You *are* a hot little Red, aren't you?"

I handed Vince the money order, and he was moved. He showed it to his wife and daughter. "Well, Comrade, I don't like to have to take money from you. I know what the struggle is like out there, trying to earn a day's bread in the factory while the bosses rob you blind."

I left as soon as I could. They all stood in the doorway looking at me fondly, Vince staggering a little. I continued to send them dollar money orders with my name in large letters and they mailed me their newspaper and party literature. But to my surprise, they did not call me or bother me in the slightest after my visit that day.

I thought about the draft board constantly. When I neared the Army recruiting booth on Times Square, I crossed the street so that they could not see me through the window. They would spot me, see the hate snarling out of my eyes, and propel me through the door and ship me to Korea. They would ask to see my 1A draft card. At night I would walk up to the booths; they fascinated me. I wanted to throw a rock through the window. But even at night, they were dangerous: what if a silent camera was taking pictures of me, or what if a piece of paper with my name on it fell out of my pocket? I spit into the street at the thought. They would find the piece of paper, they would trace me, look me up, knock on my door, see my hate, and kill me. I wasn't sure what frightened me more: combat, or having to live in Army barracks, taking showers in the nude, wet towels snapped at my ass by crackers, hiding all traces of myself. I was even self-conscious if I walked into an Irish bar, and would hide my book under a Daily News or in a paper bag, the way Grinaldi had taught me. Of course they would kill me in the barracks—a dark Jew Communist with tortured eyes—I'd go first, a pistol shot in the night or the day—an accident, jovially agreed to by all races and creeds.

The draft board summoned me to a hearing on my petition for draft exemption as a conscientious objector. I read the letter over and over again; I looked up the signature on the letter in the phone book—O'Brien—and wondered if I should disguise my voice and wake him up at 3 a.m. every night.

The hearing wasn't at Whitehall Street, but in the forties in Hell's Kitchen. I stopped off at the porno shops on the

way. Death made me horny. I looked at the women in leather with whips and my prick hit the wall. I carried Gandhi's book on non-violence, my statement of conscientious objection: "I Choose Life," and a saintly expression on my face. But there was time to kill, and there were porno shops on every block in the area. I was confused; I looked away from the ghost faces of the shop proprietors who stood up on raised platforms staring at me.

Suddenly I rushed out of a shop. There was a bunch of Communist material I had forgotten about in my wallet and my pockets—evidence I hadn't had time to burn in the toilet. I had stayed up all night burning *Daily Workers* and *National Guardians* and correspondence and books in the sink, the flames jumping toward me, then mashing the ashes and thrusting them into the toilet. There was no end to it. I ran out of matches by dawn and was still carrying three volumes of Stalin's collected writings, a recording of Paul Robeson at Peekskill, a picture book of Red Army maneuvers published in Moscow. How could I have forgotten? The stuff was in my arms. There was only an hour left before the hearing. Looking casual, I stepped off curbs and dropped the stuff into the grates of sewers. The Stalin books were too thick. I retrieved them, the garbage and sewer water falling from them. In a shop hallway, I tried to tear them apart—the red leather binding wouldn't budge. I cursed and just left them in the hallway and ran off.

I disposed of all the material. Ten minutes to the hearing. I hurried through the streets. I was confused. I tried to get it all together, to remember who I was as I entered the stone building of the Selective Service. Maybe I could be a Rabbi bop bop bop? No skull cap. Or a priest? Or a Hare Krishna Krishna? Or a superb tailor? Gandhi's book was prominently displayed in my hand.

Six gray heads looked up from a conference table as I entered. Red faces, red eyes, gray suits. I smiled, beatifically. I folded my hands.

“What would you do if a madman with a knife attacked your mother?” they asked.

“Nothing whatever,” I replied easily with a smile.

The man who was asking the questions ruffled some papers.

“How often do you go to the Community Church?”

“What?” A hook there maybe, definitely; they knew, they knew, the Rosenberg rallies were held there.

They repeated the question.

“Never,” I said. How would they know I had been to the rallies—but they must know, but I wasn’t sure if in fact they were held there.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“Have you read Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness At Noon*?”

“Yes I have. It’s a fine book.” A pacific answer.

“Yet you claim you don’t believe in resistance to totalitarianism?”

I paused. The bastard had a point, and not the kind I had expected.

“If you’ll read my statement—”

“We’ve read it.”

“I don’t believe that a violent answer to violence will ever bring peace, no. We have to learn to love all our fellow men, and answer hate with love.”

“And you never go to the Community Church?”

“Not that I recall.”

“Not that you recall. Do you believe in God?”

“In a sense, yes.”

They looked up. “What is your religion?”

“I was born Jewish.”

“What are you now?”

“I’m a member of the Wider Quaker Fellowship.”

“Do you believe in God?”

This was the crucial question, I knew. The law stipulated that no one was exempt who replied no.

“In a sense.”

“Do you believe in a Divine Being?”

I hesitated. The sweat was falling from me. "No."

They looked at each other. "You realize your claim isn't recognized then?"

"Send me to jail then. I won't lie, and I won't fight. Never. I'm a pacifist with all my heart. I believe in God as a force, an ethical spiritual force for good. But I don't see a face up there."

A fellow with a sharp face on the left talked for the first time. "You mention in your statement the influence of a man named Silverzweig."

I felt my fist tighten. "Yes."

"Who was he?"

"He was my teacher."

"What kind of teacher?"

"English teacher."

"Did you ever take long walks with him?"

"No, I—why do you ask?"

I looked up, saw the sneer and realized.

"You never took walks with him?"

"I never took walks with him. No." I felt my face blush with shame for them. I felt cold. Their faces receded. I was ashamed of having given them my statement.

I was a liar maybe. Maybe I was a goddamned liar, since I hated them so much. But no lie of mine, I thought, was as ugly as their coal and iron selves.

They dismissed me.

Four *Feuilletons*

Charles Hickox

MY FIRST DAY AT THE COLLEGE OF B — —

The advisor led me to the bathroom and toilets, running water through the basins and flushing a toilet to demonstrate thoroughness.

She spoke a sort of doctrinaire. "These facilities are used by men and women, black and white. We like to think that discipline must be voluntary."

I remarked that there was no toilet paper or soap. She replied, "Natural bodily aromas are sweet."

"Do the students have a polyandry outlook?" I asked.

"Oh my, yes, we always look on the bright side of adversity," she beamed.

"Are there any rules?" I thought this would get on with it somehow.

"Oh, no, we have never had rules in the two generations since our inception. We have a little guide containing one hundred and forty-five 'Stipulations.' We do not distribute it because it is only needed for a transgressor. Well, so long. See you in the adjoining cemetery where we take our dates."

MAY AND DECEMBER IN JULY

At a certain summer resort the young people in this story had grown up as admirers of a friend of their parents whom they had affectionately called Aunt Ursula.

Aunt Ursula sat on the beach under a parasol which sheltered her from the sun.

It was her sixtieth year, which had gained her the handle of "Aunt" to all young persons. At finishing school she had been trained not to be aglow when the air was hot.

A number of young men rested in the sand at her feet, as though she were a cool oasis.

"When did you have your change of life, Aunt?" asked one of her suitors.

"Oh, about fifty-five," replied Ursula. "It was gradual."

"Could you fall in love with one of us?" asked another man in honest wonder.

"Not fall in love, but glide into love with you, yes."

"Tonight, sweet lady?"

"Tonight. Right here. When the moon paints the waves."

OH, LOVE, OH, LOVE, OH CARELESS LOVE

"I love you so much," said Mary to her husband, Peter.

"Why?" asked Peter. "I love you too," he went on, "and I would love you more than you love me if I had the capacity. But why do you love me?"

Mary had rolled to her side of the bed and was asleep. "Why don't you say you love me early at bedtime?" Peter asked aloud.

No answer.

Peter lay alone and cold, and thought of prostitutes. Instant love, always awake. What, he wondered, becomes of ex-prostitutes. Do they marry? Do they become career women? Do they die young? Available to the public they may be, but perhaps the most mysterious of femininity. Peter worried about the futures of individual prostitutes as a matter of genuine concern. It was a responsibility he had sustained for forty years. At last the convention of prostitutes in San Francisco was held. It was a great relief to Peter. Maybe there is waiting

in the wings another scene to come on stage with a brighter future for these working women.

Peter rolled over on Mary's side of the bed. After a few tentative gestures, he whispered in Mary's ear, "Would you like to make love?"

"I guess so," Mary replied. "But why do you always wait until I am having a lovely dream?"

BLISS ENGENDERED

"The flowers that bloom in the Spring, tra la, have nothing to do with the case. . . ." The Mikado.

A conversation today as imagined by an envious old party.

"Do you believe in pre-marital sex?" asked the lovely young lady of the handsome young man.

"I consider the matter one of semantics," he replied. "For example, if neither party ever gets married, would one believe in sex before drowning at sea?"

"Why you are not even a male chauvinist!" exclaimed the young lady.

"I would like to oblige," he explained, "but the dictionary definition seemed to wander so. Something about a Dr. Chauvin."

"Now that we are talking about sex," he went on, "I suppose we are talking of a male and a female transported to delight and affection; to consummate—no, better to say—clutch each other tightly and work very hard in a sexual manner for a while—ah, here is the place—until they consummate and lose interest."

"What I want to know," the young man continued, "is why women in story and film are always shown on their backs 'making love'—so many curious words—women lying on their backs supported by three inches of hay stubble with their heads on an ant-hill and their feet in poison ivy."

"Will you marry me, dear heart?" asked the young man.

Three Poems by Ed Meek

GENERAL HEALTH

"Just who did kill Dr. Brewer?" Nurse Kelly asks in the caf on break.

"I resent your asking."

Her eyes flit about the room. "I know you've been seeing his former wife," she says, "you had an affair with her sister-in-law, your wife's sister, who Dr. Brewer raped one night in blind fury because she brought up his son as a homosexual whom you also had relations with though no one knows but your wife's sister, the only woman you ever loved despite her sterility from Dr. Brewer's rape. She tells me everything because I am her one true friend."

Perhaps, I think, perhaps, but how in God's name did she get all that out of Sandra unless she's hiding something more and if she knows, who knows, there might be others. The police? Not to mention the effect on my son David if all this came out with his high school graduation up for this weekend. "Alright," I say, grasping her hand under the table, "let's go."

KING KONG AND THE PILOT

Days have been passing by like plastic airplanes on an assembly line in a toy factory. I made plastic airplanes with pilots in them and springs which came out of the pilots' heads and attached them to the ceiling of my bedroom. I came home juiced one night and collided with 7 planes in the dark. King Kong swatted them when he was on the Empire State, I see what he meant, you knock one away, another springs back.

Now it isn't the same. I can't put another pilot in a cockpit and send him out into the blue knowing I have profaned the work of a dozen men and women in one unleashed act. Never again will I stand between fat Mary who takes up her space and half mine and George Maguire, old enough to call dad and who, every time the green production light flashed, would say, "Already Eddie?"

I keep one of the pilots in my bureau. Now and then I take him out, "Hello George," I say. We talk about changing times and things. He has an orange face, bushy black eyebrows, a mustache, goggles, a pilot's helmet, and a red suit with black gloves. No legs, he doesn't have any legs.

THINGS TO DO

To sleep at the Circus wait outside the elephant cages. When the elephant man goes in to feed and clean, sneak in behind and hide in the hay. It will be warm and will not smell nice.

Relax, when they find you they'll give you a job cleaning up. 25 a week, 3 meals daily and you sleep with the elephants.

Don't get any ideas. Unlike many other animals elephants are not in the least bit sensitive. To test the elephant's sensitivity, touch him in the trunk with a fork. No response? Pull on his trunk and prick him in the side. Still nothing? Drop a boulder on his foot and hammer the fork into his trunk.

If you're feeling low, lie down and have the elephant tickle you with his foot. You can't stop laughing!

You may want to engage in "activities to avoid boredom". Here are some suggestions but feel free to invent games of your own and above all be imaginative. (1) eye-contact: stare at the elephant and see who looks away first. (2) Dancing: this is the one where the elephant goes up on hind legs. Elephants love to learn the "new dances". (3) Arm-wrestling.

Elephants are great lovers of practical jokes. Here are a couple of tricks to play. Trip the elephants as they leave the cage. Paint one of the elephants pink so the others think they're seeing things. Bend down low, let one arm drag on the floor, then gain a thousand pounds.

THE KNOCK

Thomas Bottle was thinking of all the things he hated: hair down his back when he got a haircut; his Aunt Fern's kitty litter; ringworm; the loud women in baseball caps who came every summer to paint the ocean below his house; and Jehovah's Witnesses who came to sell him *Awake!* and *The Watchtower*. Thomas Bottle felt he could take care of himself, in his own clean way, without someone muscling in to tell him how. There were a number of other things he hated, but before he could list them there was a knock on the door. A pair of gleaming Orientals in muskrat stoles stepped in and invited him to follow them. He parried their invitation by asking what they did in their spare time. One bowed and said, "I am a third degree black belt." The other just smiled, showing two enormous gold teeth. Thomas Bottle was suddenly frightened, and ran upstairs and locked himself in the bathroom. After about fifteen minutes he came back down. The black belt had disappeared. The other one—who continued to smile those gold teeth—was sitting at the dining room table, polishing the wax fruit with a filthy handkerchief. Thomas tried to be calm. He said, "At the risk of sounding rude, I must ask you to go. I admire your resolve, but I have problems of my own." The Oriental continued to polish the fruit. "I don't think you understand my position," Thomas said. "Moreover, I pay taxes." The Oriental only smiled, holding a pear up to the light. Then the black belt reappeared, followed by a striking blonde who had to be six feet tall. "I suppose she's going to take off all her clothes now," Thomas told them. "I suppose that's what you've got up your sleeves." He was getting angry. "But it won't work! I say it won't work, damn you! I keep my hedges trimmed! What do you want, blood from a stone!" But Thomas Bottle's protests were in vain. The blonde slipped off her jogging togs and stood before the bowl of wax fruit, holding her palms up; she was flanked on either side by the Orientals, and all three were grinning profusely.

David Ignatow

AN ACCOUNT IN THE PRESENT TENSE OF HOW IT ALL HAPPENED

I am about to close my refrigerator after removing a package of meat when I hear my door lock turning and a crew of men, without so much as first knocking, walk in. They stride directly over to the refrigerator, tie rope around it, hoist it upon a dolly and ride it out the door. Who are these people and why are they taking my refrigerator when there is nothing wrong with it? They are making some kind of mistake. Stop, I cry. You are in the wrong apartment. Not one turns his head to look at me or to listen. At that moment, a second crew of three men, almost on the heels of the first, strides in and lifts up my television set between them and walks out with it. I scream for help. I pound their shoulders but get no response, as if they were made of wood. I scream and scream, and another crew is right behind the second, this time to remove my bed. I am going to be left with nothing, nothing. I am about to get on the phone to call the police when I notice that they have cut the wires and taken the phone with them.

They remove dishes, cutlery, rugs, books, lamps; screw out the bulbs. They leave me an empty apartment and begin to tear down the apartment walls. They knock out the walls of the building itself. I flee into the street, just barely in time before they begin to attack the stairs and the elevators. Out in the street I see that it's happening to each apartment build-

ing on the block and all the tenants are milling around, with the few clothes on their backs they managed to grab and are shouting at each other in panic and wild rage. We are totally stranded, there are no police and no emergency welfare agencies in sight. The streets are beginning to resemble a bombed out town, and we see that we will have to fend for ourselves with our bare hands. There is a park nearby and we begin to converge upon it. It has large, open spaces where we will be able to lie down and rest and perhaps make our beds there for the night with what linen and bed clothes we were able to rescue from those inhuman hands. It's all over, it seems, that which gave us our comforts and pleasures. It's back to the woods and fields, and did anybody bring a knife or a gun with which to hunt a rabbit or a bird? We look at each other in the dawn of an understanding and we smile.

Stephen Sossaman

AFTER LUNCH

I am riding down Fifth Avenue on a bus. A woman touches my leg and speaks of forests. My need unfolds like a newborn's limb, stiff and uncertain. She whispers close and I tremble as we reach my stop. I have become a giant penis. I bounce through the aisle and down the rear steps, gathering my scrotum like a priest's skirts. Crowds gather. Old women smile approval. Friends call to me and toss flowers, as she rolls me home through the park.

December

Geneviève Serreau

Since few were living on those heights aside from the children, deaths were few as well and funeral arrangements simple. They carried him out on a farm wagon drawn by a work horse. On steep grades the farmer cranked the brake handle tight. The road glaring white. Blinds the eyes. The din of the wheel rims crushing stones. A grey mare leans her neck across a gate dreamily watching the other one pass, her still profile cut out of cardboard. While they walked the children silently played with little broken things found deep in their pockets. Transferred them from one hand to another then into pocket and back to hand again. The smallest ones closed their fists around polished chestnuts. Head raised all the blue of the sky. Dazzling mother of pearl. December sky. Knives of winter behind poised to fall. *Even coffins beneath their canopy at night.*

The old lady kept a photo in the portfolio with worn down

corners under the receipts lists certificates prescriptions mementos. Lift the pages skin by skin, nothing. Then where did I put it. Ah. The click of a clasp and it's there flattened dog-eared at the right corner, still the white scar of a crease. Between thumb and forefinger. Look, she says, this was two years before. I won't look, thinks the young woman. In turn the friend of the family respectfully between thumb and forefinger. That's him exactly, says the friend. Isn't it, says the old lady. Especially the eyes. Yes the eyes. I won't look. The expression. Yes the expression. If I look I will lose him instantly. I can see him again, says the friend. Yes you can see him again. If I look I'll stop seeing him forever. The friend's glance shuttles back and forth between the flattened picture and the young woman who gazes out the window at the trees, her still profile cut out of cardboard. Crazy how much she resembles him, says the friend. Me. How much she has begun to resemble her father now that. The young woman holds out her hand. A thumb on the picture how much she resembles him. Fixed forever in memory the clear-walled high forehead the snowy locks the over-large eyes that look blind the sinuous mouth half-open not for a smile. Lips stretched across the stern alignment of dentures almost glimpsed above guessed below. What is that, says the young woman and points with her fingernail to the thin crevice between the lips, little oblong black egg. Well that. The hands of the old lady on the photo. Magnifying glass helping the spectacles. Where. What. His mouth I don't. What is he holding there between his teeth. Nothing. Lips. Like everyone. Half open. What is. Nothing. Nothing at all. The trembling hands of the old lady on the clasp. The little flat square returned to its night. *Of night raising the ebony plumes*. What was there between his teeth. What they hadn't noticed that was there.

Played with little broken things found deep in their pockets. How much she resembles him, has begun to resemble him. Crazy. Knives of winter behind poised to fall. They

carried him out on a farm wagon because there was no hearse. Because a hearse would have broken down in the long white road, on the grades the farmer cranked the brake handle tight. A hay wagon. The old mare shook her mane to scatter the horseflies with an old patient impatience. They had to lash the coffin with ropes passed around the slats so it wouldn't pitch on the floor of the wagon. The din of the wheel rims crushing stones.

In the large resounding house the sound of nails being driven home. Through the open windows far in the country the happy sound of the hammer as they write it in dictations. Iron against iron falling. The stroke always preceding the sound of the stroke. They nailed him before the meal. There is no longer a metalsmith in the village. Then the meal. Nor a cartwright nor a blacksmith. Cheap shops and garage mechanics. The children on the mountain heard it clearly. They didn't know that you nail down the dead. On mountain slopes looking for sprigs of wild lavender. Picking the brittle December stem the greyish cluster barely recognizable dry all the scent inside. Rubbing a cluster between their palms all day on their hands the blue scent. From the mountain they brought back stiff bunches tied with a pliant stem that they dropped on the closed coffin loosening their tight grip on the precious bouquet. Just as the teachers had told them to do. Then step by step backing toward the door without taking their eyes off the coffin resting on four chairs the thin dusty bouquets in a row on the lid. By the door the funeral director's man it is the grocer all in black unrecognizable, with one hand he holds his round hat against his fly and shifts a bit from one foot to the other.

In the next room they have begun to eat. The children hear the sounds of forks and glasses and conversations in low calm voices. They said how did it happen. That is how it happened and this is how. The young woman doesn't eat. Come from Paris that very morning. It happened because he fell. The three little stone steps there in the yard. The second is broken. And so he fell. In Paris it is raining in Paris there is a

man his hand on my skin his mouth on my mouth. Eat something, says the old lady gently. But it isn't possible it was more than six months ago and he recovered perfectly. The second step is broken. The chestnuts still in the hollow of their cracked husks. In the oblong slit under stretched lips the dark polished skin. They hold them bare in the fist. Between their too short fingers the glow of winter's fruit. Thin bouquets lined up stiffly on the lid the blue scent trapped inside. Old people who fall. You would have thought it a black puddle at the foot of the three steps they helped him up he hadn't broken anything. Since then. The mouth a bit open he breathed with difficulty he said nothing. Yes since then. In Paris there is a man his mouth on my mouth. But it isn't possible he recovered perfectly. Not the same since. It happened that's all it happened. The stern alignment of the three steps the second broken. They brought the real bouquets with the desert. Ordered in town sprays of gladioli tousled chrysanthemums. Not on the lid, the old lady said gently.

The road glaring white blinding. *At a trot tall mares of blue and black.* Watching the other one pass, her profile cut out of cardboard. Behind the farm wagon the cortege drags out slowly the children first then the family then the villagers. The garage mechanic rides in a jeep with his old mother, he sprains his ankles in the potholes. In Paris it is raining on the sidewalks smooth his hand on my skin in the rain in Paris. The jeep is parked far away under the chestnuts the children have seen it. They stumble on the road in their Sunday shoes. Slip them off without a word one by one against the bank. Their bare feet agile between the cold pebbles. December. Mother of pearl sky dazzling the din of the wheel rims crushing stones. They play silently with little broken things found deep in their pockets. The slow cortege drags out thin black silhoutettes on the white blinding road.

The old lady cannot go on. Standing sees nothing anymore neither the road nor the wagon nor the sky. The bouquets of

lavender that trembled on the lid have fallen the others also all the flowers right to the floor of the cart between the ropes that lash the coffin. The wagon has stopped on a flat. There is a pause. The mare brushes off the December horseflies strikes the ground with her right hoof. The children silently exchange the little broken things the smooth chestnuts. The farmer waits the reins slack between his fingers he has lowered the brim of his hat over his eyes no longer watches the dazzling road but a small space between his feet. *Even coffins*. It is nothing, says the old lady, let's go on. The farmer releases the brake handle raises his head clicks his tongue. Again the din of the wheels on the stones. Bare in their fists between short fingers the last polished chestnuts fallen from their husks. His mouth on my mouth there in the rain. He was an old man and he fell. Destroy the three steps of the yard the stern alignment the second is broken there never will have been three steps. There never will have been a man in Paris his mouth on my mouth death between my teeth, little black oblong egg. Crazy how much she resembles him. Head raised all the blue of the sky. Old impatient patience. Blue of the sky. The knives of winter behind poised to fall. Blue of the sky. What there was between his teeth. *Beneath their canopy of night raising the ebony plumes*. What is there between my teeth. *Moving off at a trot tall mares of blue and black*.

—*Translated from the French by*
Lee Leggett

An Indulgence of Authors' Self-Portraits

One evening fifteen years ago Burt Britton (now head of the Review department at the Strand Bookstore) and Norman Mailer were sitting together in the Village Vanguard where Britton then worked. On impulse, Britton asked Mailer for a self-portrait. Mailer complied—the first of a collection which began to fill the pages of a blank book in the Strand. These were done by friends—primarily writers—who entered their drawings and salutations when they visited the store. No one has refused him a self-portrait. When he remarked on James Jones' generosity, Jones explained, "Burt, for Christ's sake, I wouldn't be left out of that book!"

As his collection grew, Britton was approached by a number of publishers, but always refused publication on the grounds that the self-portraits were the property of his private mania. But recently Anais Nin and others have persuaded him to let others in on how writers view themselves. Random House will publish the entire collection this fall under the title, *Self-Portraits—Book People Picture Themselves*. Many of the portraits reproduced here are by writers who have been published and/or interviewed in this magazine.

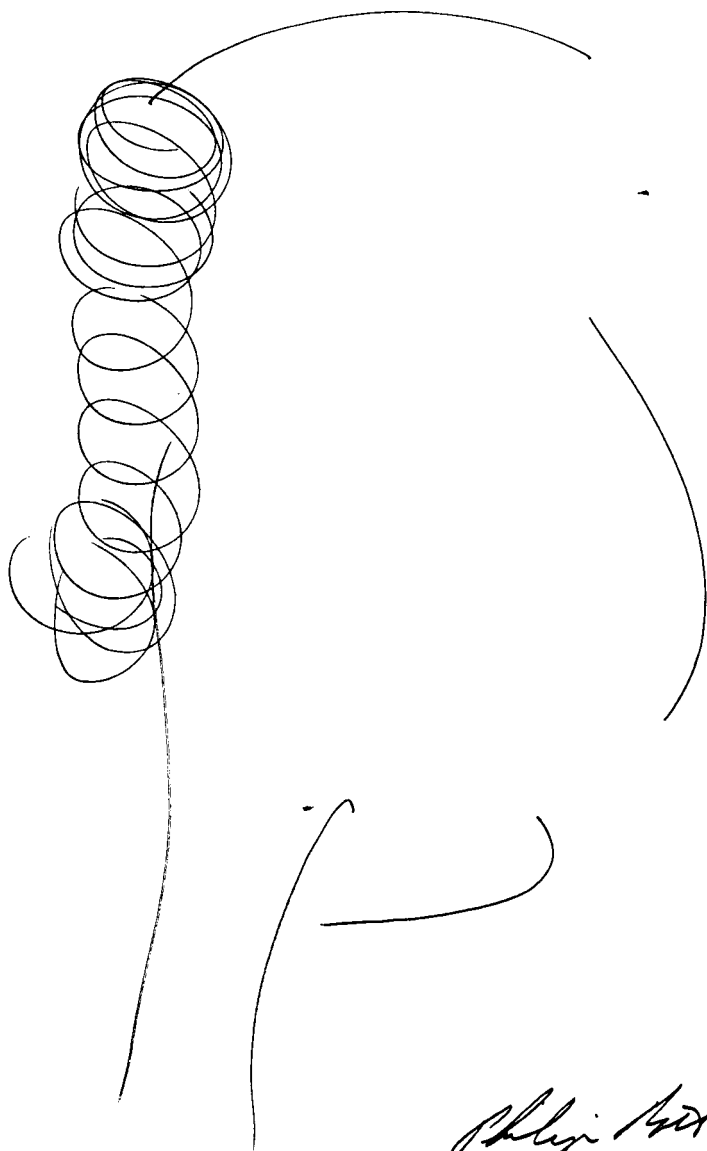
L.M.

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From the forthcoming book SELF PORTRAITS Book People Picture Themselves

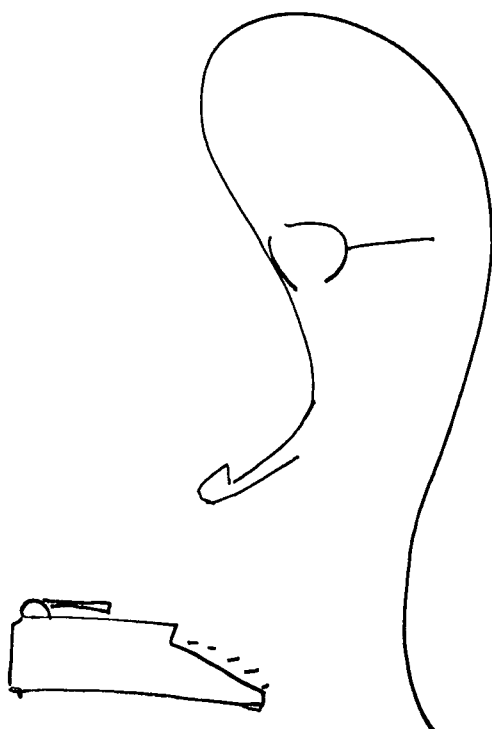
Collected by Burt Britton

To be published by Random House, Inc.



Philip Roth

Philip Roth



*To Percy and Burt
Best—
Arthur Miller*

Arthur Miller



OLD SOLDIERS NEVER DIE.

THEY WRITE NOVELS.

BLACKSTONE
JAN 17, 1975.

James Jones



NIM

Norman Mailer



Ron Padgett

Ron Padgett



Alec Waugh: 75 not out

Alec Waugh



● My dear Daddy: This is a self portrait of your son on the day we thrown back the Yankee bastards, Your son Willie ●

William Styron



*Downhill all the way,
Irwin Shaw*

Irwin Shaw



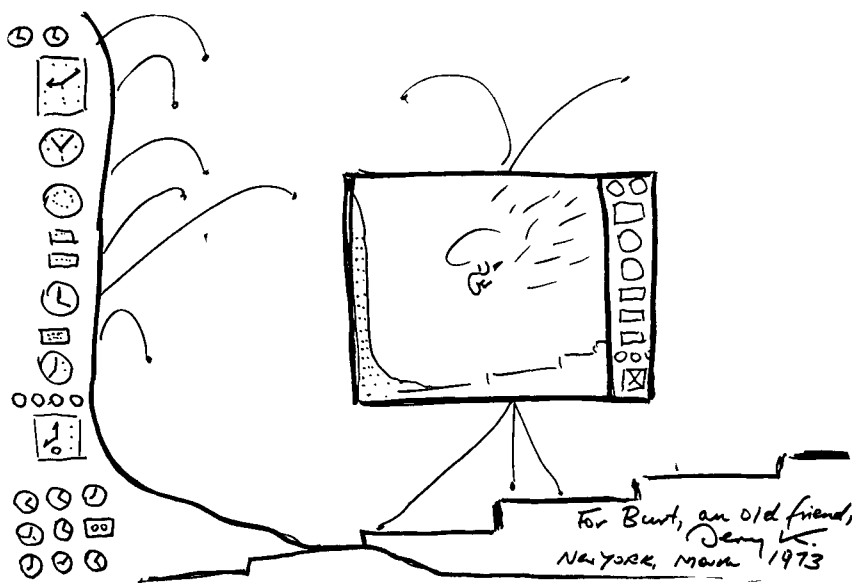
William Burroughs
April 17, 1974

William Burroughs



Allen Ginsberg
Full Moon
Oct 30, 1974 St Marks Church
10:15 PM

Allen Ginsberg



Jerzy Kosinski

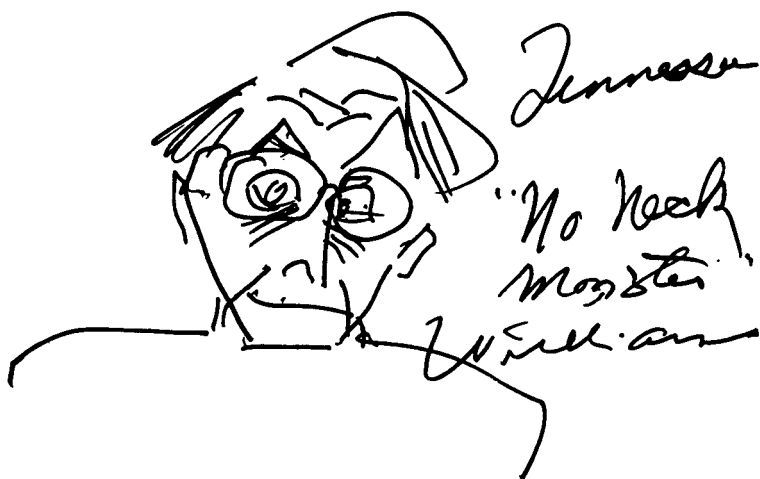


James Baldwin

June 28, '73

NY

James Baldwin



off - off - off - off - off

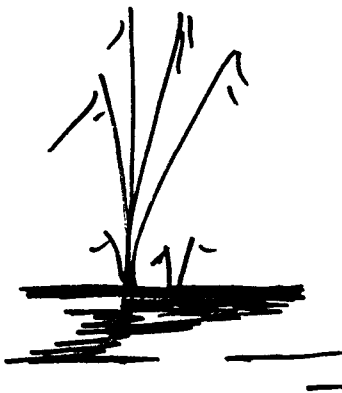
away

74

Tennessee Williams



Jorge Luis Borges



.....

MY FACE (BEFORE MY PARENTS WERE
BORN) Peter Matthiessen

Peter Matthiessen

Aram Saroyan

THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL

I don't want to write the great American novel
And set people walking across the pages of a book
Doing things like sweating on page 4, praying on page 45,
Making love on 200, and smoking cigarettes on 85, 107, 136
And a lot of other pages—what good would that do?

What good would it do to make up a hero who combined
All of my good qualities and only a few of my faults
And set him loose through sentences and paragraphs,
Periods and semi-colons, as well as continuous commas,
Making the world an arresting drama of keen insights.

And killer instincts, of loners and lovers, devils
and angels, the power-mad and the happy poor?
After all, the world is something else when you get
Right down to it: a lady-bug, for instance. A child
who needs her shoe tied. And I don't know if I could

Find the proper time and place for such reality in
My sweeping saga of will and deception, telephone calls
And unbelievable tension, plus booze, pot, and pills.
Would any of my characters be able to stomach, or even
notice the small tragedy of the leaves in the fall,

A sidewalk drawing, or a Mickey Mouse watch?
Probably not. They would be so obsessed with money and war,
the price of oil and the rise of Third World powers that
There just wouldn't be time for such trivia. And my hero
Himself would be lost to me forever, and I would be lonely.

Two Poems by Elizabeth Handel

A PRODUCT OF THE UNION VIEWS
A CANDID WEDDING PORTRAIT

Mother grips an orchid to her smallish purse
And lifts her face to the photographer
Who, like me, now stands and waits for Father
to rescue two exposed, embarrassed hands.
The photographer is blind to what he sees—
He hits the shutter: indifferent film will hold the scene
together.
As for me, it is my conscious indiscretion to scrutinize the
album page—
To startle lives among the ripple edges, beneath the shallow
glaze.
The wedding is in June. They ask only that the camera
should record
Their perfect bliss, the orchid, the flattery of clothes;
But beneath each pose, by birthright, I look in:
Mother is lost, unhappy, almost sorry and Father sees the
tears to come,
The ones I saw, cascading into pot roasts, mashed potatoes,
pooled on plates.

CLARENCE IN THE SEAFOOD PALACE

Clarence was not known for speech or grace;
His looks were those of ordinary men;
In Roman times he might have washed the grapes for
 others' orgies,
For his were lowly tasks of preparation
Behind the diamond window of a swinging door.
Clarence was a chosen person that they got somewhere
To be lower than a cook, but higher than a dishboy.
He placed lobster claws, two by two,
Beside their preboiled fuselages, busted up for fancy salads,
Antennae waving carefree from the luncheon platter;
So he could count, make no mistake.
The hostess banned him from the dining room
(He had no "class") but she couldn't stop his fingerprints,
Which entered by the hundreds on the backs of shellfish—
And this is what he loved: to watch his works in
 grand procession,
Held high above all men on sacred trays.

Jack Anderson

CONNECTIONS

We are all connected, one unto another.

A bulb in my hallway has burned out. I keep fitting new bulbs into the socket. Nothing happens.

Then I find in my hallway a switch I have never noticed before. I flick it on and off, on and off. Nothing happens.

Three blocks away, in their apartment, a wife calls to her husband, "Henry! Come quick! The lights seem to be going on and off for no reason."

PROLEGOMENA TO THE GEOPHYSICS OF THE EMOTIONS

Sometimes I feel myself possessed by great mysterious emotions.

Strong feelings of rage, joy, or sadness possess me for no reason I can understand. I have been going about as I usually do when, suddenly, without warning, I am overwhelmed by some feeling. There it is. As real as anything. Yet I can find no explanation for it. It seems to come out of nowhere to me. I can hardly believe this emotion is mine. Perhaps my instincts are right. Perhaps what I feel at such times are not my emotions, but the emotions of other people—of total strangers, perhaps.

Perhaps people feel some emotions so strongly that the strength of those emotions becomes a natural force like gravity or sound waves. Then they transmit their emotions, which vibrate or pulse or fall like invisible meteors through space. Where they fall, someone else is possessed by those emotions, though he cannot think why he should feel them.

My rage, it occurs to me, is a wealthy widow in Buenos Aires shopping on the Avenida Santa Fe. She could buy anything she wants there. But it is all so tiresome, she cannot find what she wants, and the sales girls are either stupid or rude. At this rate, how will she ever get to the opera tonight? And, no doubt, just as she's ready to leave for the opera—she's sure of it—her Pekingese will vomit again on the living room carpet.

Her annoyance turns to rage, her rage maddens her, then
leaves her: it crosses the city and its suburbs, it crosses the
border of a foreign country, it drifts past Rio de Janeiro and
its merrymakers on the beach, it steams like the Amazon
rain forest it passes over, it passes out to sea, it is crossing
the Atlantic.

And here it is, it has come to me. I feel it, that rage which
exists for no reason of my own.

As for the widow in Buenos Aires, she is happy now, she is
smiling, flirting, drinking sherry. Her rage has passed.

My joy. My joy is a young man in San Francisco having
himself a wild time. He's making the rounds of the bars
and he's feeling no pain. So he starts acting silly. In one
bar, after changing lots of bills, he scatters the coins
around, shouting "Merry Christmas! Santa's here!"
When the other customers in that bar actually start
scrambling for the coins, he laughs uproariously. After the
bouncer hustles him out, he tap dances in the street until
he's picked up by a squad car and the cops drive him
home. He giggles to himself all during the ride.

But home again, he is quiet. His joy has passed, it has passed
on to me.

When I am sad, I sigh with the sadness of an old Eskimo
grandmother, aching and feeble, who has been left behind
by her children to freeze to death in the snow. She re-
members her husband . . . her firstborn. . . . She grieves.

But her sadness goes. She curls up, resigned, in her snow-
house and gazes toward sleep. She asks sleep to draw
nearer.

Then it is I who wake up in the night, sad, sorrowful,
grieving for no cause.

And when I feel other emotions, those emotions may be a
child having a tooth pulled, a Golden Wedding celebra-
tion, an aerialist crossing Niagara on a wire.

Just as I am possessed by the emotions of strangers, so my own emotions pass from me to possess other people, other strangers. This rage, this joy, this sadness I feel because of what happened today is leaving me, moving out.

Someone, near or far off—I don't even know if it's a man or a woman—is feeling this feeling now, feeling this strongly, without knowing why.

THE DEFINITION OF “PLINTH”

Plinth: the ring of truth and false pretenses

Plinth: the sound of a plucked string

Plinth: or gravel

Plinth: arcades colonnades a classic plaza

a classic lack of seriousness begins to be apparent here
but too much seriousness is not serious I interject
(hello there) and similarly what about sincerity or lack
of sincerity am I sincere? how much do I feel? am I
unfeeling heartless am I doing this sincerely or only
for effect? what is an effect?

Plinth

Plinth: a pinched nerve

Plinth (a fantasy): psychiatrists and priests choose volunteers
for experiments they lead them into con-
fessionals they call this freedom of research
freedom of religion Robert calls George in
the middle of the night from North Caro-
lina Robert has been drinking Robert is
still drinking as he talks Robert talks about
nothing but drinking

a fantasy? a fiction? a truth: I cannot resist the temptation to
turn everything into fiction I almost changed the
names of the people in the passage above to spare
them to spare them I call it fantasy

a fantasy: does this show a lack of sincerity seriousness or
compassion does this show lack of feeling does this
show my vanity?

Plinth: a vanity press the Skating Vanities the Ice Follies

Plinth: a free association an avenue of white buildings lead-

ing toward white mountains most likely the Alps the
Andes or the White Mountains

Plinth: a formal city square where all the buildings on each
side are identical architecturally a statue of the Libera-
tor in the center of the square
a desire to stop now and go off to whore

Plinth: the fear of doctors the omnipresence of surgeons the
probability that what you most enjoy will be cut out
because of blood pressure brood pressure

Plinth: the sound made by a plectrum

Plinth

Plinth: the sound made by the fear of bandits the sound of a
trolley pole moving along a trolley wire the sound of
being interesting

is this interesting why must things be interesting why must
anyone feel he needs to be interesting why must I
make myself interesting am I selling myself by trying
to make myself interesting?

Plinth: a mark of punctuation

my handwriting has grown more jagged and illegible since I
wrote a whole book in longhand

I must say something in this line because I know what I'll say
next

Plinth

what I say next is: here is where I turned the page in the first
longhand version of this but this is not where I turned
the page in the second draft in the second draft I
turned the page at

“Plinth: a mark of punctuation”—which is not where I turn
the page when I type this

all of which suggests that I assume there may be further
revisions that despite its appearance my text is not an
improvisation that rather it is formally conceived and
perhaps is being revised against my instincts in an
effort to make it interesting

(I note in passing that I have just turned the page in the
typescript of this)

everything becomes art I once knew a man named Art Kunst
he taught me to play whist (is this interesting? should
it be?)
my glasses fell off my nose here I wrote the next item with my
glasses off I had to bend very close to the page to
write I know the reason why I am saying this is prob-
ably to be interesting
Plinth: a clavichord a clavicle an orange peel a peanut gallery
a bindlestiff what nice words
now I am thinking of making myself a cup of instant coffee I
accompany my writing with cups of coffee I no longer
even know whether I really like coffee or whether I
just use it as a means to measure without recourse to
a clock where I am in my writing time
actually I had thought about coffee earlier but did nothing
then because I had another thought I thought would
be more more what more interesting I suppose
Plinth: the capital of Peru
Plinth: the art of making love to a deafmute
Plinth: a salt lick
now I must get myself some coffee no matter what
now I feel I've been going on with this long enough I can't
help but try to pull this into shape to come to some
kind of point or climax through sheer force of artistic
habit so what I do is
Plinth: the sound of falling asleep a stone dropped into water
at a ruined temple (a fantasy) psychiatrists and priests
push sacrificial victims over the edge they call it re-
search research or research into the pathology of
plinth: a falling body
Plinth: a cleft palate china plate the Great Wall of China
Plinth
Plinth: a pebble in a shoe a ship in a bottle a bottle of sleep
Plinth: Venetian blinds
Plinth: the simplest way to conclude which is
Plinth
Plinth: the ring of truth and false pretenses

Four Poems by A. G. Sobin

WHAT THEY HAD COME FOR

Getting ten thousand feet "closer to nature"
by Desolation Trail
they had *seen* their breath in mid-July.

Then, getting thoroughly wet,
she kneels in deep moss
to drink from the stream,
her curled hands numb as a tin cup
against her cheeks as icy water
runs down the over-heated skin
between her breasts.

He sinks both his thumbs hard
into the hot cheeks of an orange
and pulls the large-pored skin away
piece by piece.

and from his dripping fingertips the strings
of white netting fall into the breeze
and float away like drifting nerves.

She separates the sections
with great care as if dissecting
a protozoan colony or miniature sun
from the surface of the stream

and taking the seeds one by one
from her lips
like the nuclei of broken cells
she lines them up on an enormous stone—
Pluto, Neptune, Uranus, Saturn . . .
for the sun to dry.

19TH CENTURY LANDSCAPE WITH POND

You are in an outdoor painting.

In the barnyard
a farm is forking hay
from an inexhaustible stack
to permanently contented animals.

At the pond
a boy in a flowering blue shirt
is fishing with infinite patience.

You are not infinite;

you stood close to the boy, bored,
looking off into the vanishing point
in the yellow and mauve pastures.

But the painter, in a single, long awaited
moment of dissatisfaction,
pulled the grass up over you

and now, where you are buried
a cow with infinite thirst
drinks from the pond.

CAMOUFLAGE IN NATURE

*“Hidden in this photograph of thick
jungle are four enemy snipers—
How many can you find?”
—U.S.M.C. Training Bulletin*

To get the drop on the clerk
at the Munger Branch Post Office
we stand in profile perfectly still
against the bulletin board
taking up positions among the prowlers,
the Black Panthers, the urban guerrillas.

We wear the dull expressions
of those being photographed
against their will
and match the lights and greys
of our likenesses
to those of the posters
until flies can sense no life
and light on our faces
as often as theirs.

The clerk lifts his head
and stares right at us.
We stop breathing. He looks hard;
shakes his head as if to clear it,
blinks several times, then
quietly goes back to counting
endless sheets of postage.

It's worked! It's worked!
We slip off the wall like jello

and into the street—embracing,
drunk with success. We can be seen
prancing away down the long sidewalk
growing smaller and smaller
among the thick October trees

and as time wears on we grow tiny;
our shadows intensify, our borders bleed,
our bodies turn the colors of autumn
until we disappear completely
between the huge bright dots of the world.

HARD WOMAN

You kneel at the stream
to drink from your hands.

One touch of your lips
to the water
freezes everything
for miles around.

The ice you hold
in your cupped hands
is a perfect breast.

You toss it to me.

BUT

1.

Because there are things we don't understand, we're shaking
our heads no. But still there are acupuncture needles,
mysterious as Excalibur, in a numb chest,
working. We shake our heads no but a ten-mile fish
scratched into plateau takes fish-shape only from ten miles
up; it dates back to the Pleistocene. No. Say the ivy doesn't
eat light, say the other nine-tenths of iceberg and two-thirds
of brain are out of sight out of mind, there was *not* a hailstone
soccerball-big on the roof of Old Lady Hathaway's house
back in '54, there is no such thing as the extrasensory yo-yo
thread growing warm, and taut, when I turn my back to you
and it
pulls me facing you moist-eyed again and the sheets crease
like siamesetwin-placenta between us now and I'm in you
like crazy.

2.

There are no atheists
in foxholes. Dickinson,
at her end, believed
in a fly. But it was something.
We shake our heads
no, as if our lips were art-gum
erasing all trace of metaphysical
being from the air below
our noses. And maybe the nay-saying's
true: I've seen them, blood-edged, a
corpse's commode, and there are no
Gods in foxholes either. Say the

door flew open with something so strange
as anger and you refused to walk
back into the room to me. Say you
wouldn't walk. Say it rained cold
eels for seven nights in a
row now. No.

3.

But what's true, what's sometimes
yes, shakes its head in the up and down
declamatory one-shape, scratches
its mark on the aether. I'm writing
to tell you the tent filled with folk from five
counties, and not a single one but sweated
a tiara of bodily process. When
the preacher hallooed from the podium not a one
but felt his pores take the voice
like the microphone's acoustical holes. I
tell you the sawdust underfoot was in empathy
with crutches. I tell you hands sang. The
mutes made birds of them. When the wheelchair
lady was smote on her brow with a prayercloth
not a one but knew through the weakness had struck
her these last seven years she would unfold
her legs' dark cricket-music and walk
back hymning into her husband's arms. And the
prayercloth struck her with a yes-mark. And
she walked back. She walked back.

I know what you're going to say.

But she walked.

Last Words

(monologue for radio)

Michael McGuire

(The old man, at times short of breath, speaks very slowly, though more quickly when amused. The clock, at varying levels, is heard throughout. At the beginning, it ticks by itself for several seconds.)

I give thanks. I wonder if their sensors pick that up. I wonder if the monitor registers an unfortunate rise in temperature. I extend these fingers. In this white room it is difficult not to think of bodies. The slight weight of the blankets on the clean sheets, the warmth of the pillow like a face against my own.

Secretly, I would have liked to stop it sooner. To paralyze the violence as Cezanne might have done. To speak one word . . . But the tongue in the dry mouth is no longer willing.

I have forgotten my lines. A shadowy Caesar follows the chalk line to the end. On the spot the words won't matter. History will happen to me too.

I do not hear the helpless shuffling of slippers in the hall, muffled flushings, the deep difficult coughs of old men retching. Here, washed clean like a corpse, I wander freely through the human mind. I remember loveliness too, yes. First seen in a listening girl, and held "for a fleeting second" in my arms. Shall I slip away like this, my breath catching, their dials spinning? The dying excited by the dead. I am not here, these wires leading from my heart! I'm with you. With you. Then I wake in death's dream room, frightened.

(Pause)

Climbing the long steps of the Museum of Natural History, I retrace the bare line of the present. Looking back . . . Grant's Park, Lincoln Park Zoo, the room, the youth, the urban trail I followed for fifty years, the last foolish love. . . Yet, even here, at the summit of these stairs, with half the city, this life, just visible through the rain, only words come . . . only words remain.

Entering the grand hall, mentally I time it: late fall, late afternoon, late, very late, in life. Another still figure, mine, stands amid bronze Indians on the marble floor, gazing almost serenely up at the great murals of the open country. Here the helpless sounds of life cannot penetrate. There is no one whimpering outside my door or choking in my ear. Here I am alone. Unnoticed, I disappear between the dustless silent cases. Practically transformed, I step among the wondrously poised inhabitants of the American forests. It pleases me that these natural moments have been caught, perhaps held forever. It pleases me that something has been preserved.

Rain on the black-painted skylight. A natural drum roll, rising like the numbers of the dead, and still rising. The toll rising in my ears, I wander still, retracing an original I have almost forgotten. My body like someone else's. Remembered. My fingers along the glass like a little boy's. The dead man flushes grouse and quail from realistic branches. And a trail of water descends the row of exhibited life, now glittering between the startled greater mammals, now reflecting the dumb stare of the lined-up skeletons of evolution. At the base of an empty marble staircase my pool widens, cold and white like moonlight. My own recurring echoes place me near the beginnings, the long dark Hall of Man.

Little drops of water fall silently from the edges of this coat. Rain still beating on a small black-painted window high in the opposing wall. Rain lashing the big city buildings, the empty parks. And I almost safe behind the glass and stone, safe with memories that form and reform, and an image that may never coalesce.

I stand alone in a pool of water by a dark tangle of branches I had not seen before. My overcoat drips softly. I am motionless beside the frozen struggle, the man-viewed elements of the natural process, a curator's attempt at awful reality. Silently, eternally, dream-like . . . the stuffed predator theatrically disembowels a smaller creature. Enclosed official violence. Factual, historical, concrete. A painted bird. First she (the victim) is skinned, the little skull carved out, the muscles pulled from her wings, her legs. Then she is sewn together again over balsa and wire, her skin dusted with powdered borax, her faded feathers touched up with oils and painted blood.

The action of the mind, you say. Of whose mind? What art is this existence? And what can one say about art—except that the human image is there. Perhaps there only.

I withdraw my fingers from the glass. I do not like that smoothness. I regret having left my prints where they do not belong. I do not contrive the events of destruction, or even raise my voice in opposition. I watch a painted bird whose bright glass eyes do not hold the memory of her death, who has no need of words. Turn now. Leave her alone. She is dead and does not need to be reminded.

On then, enter that darkness, this stillness. I slow before the life-size illuminated figures, now pleasantly locked in dumb eternity, as if, for all the world they had once lived and loved and died suddenly on one bright day that has not ended yet. Now, their cases stacked in natural progression from the dim red dawn to the final blinding sunset, they wait. But why do these strong hands tremble on the glass like a child's, like a child's?

I follow the storied life back towards the beginnings. Little drops of water down a dark hall. I wander still, having not once heard purpose in these, my steps. I pass the stilted huts of the Lake-Dwellers, silent, secure before the coming dark. I pause, envious, by the Boar-Killer with Dogs and Spear, and continue past the Sun-Worshipper and the Long Stones. Finally, alone, the beginning and the end, I stop, my forehead against the cold glass before the final grouping: wondering, grateful human family, man in the dry cave, man and fire, man out of the dark night, man and woman. And outside, looking in, old man with memories and dreams, and beyond that, silent pouring rain.

Perhaps I am in my room after all. And the time is earlier. Somewhat earlier. And it is raining. The rain, through myriad wires, falls past my window. I listen to the rain. I remember a poem to the effect that the June rains "just fall." A poem to be whispered in a warm ear, one's face in long soft hair. But the words seem foreign now. I no longer understand them. These November rains are not simply falling. They

drum. A dirge. They fill. There is a pressure on the inside of my lids, a pressure throughout, as if I must at once open my eyes, and see this room and call a name and . . . But I do not open my eyes, and I do not call.

I hate this time of year. There is nothing to be said about it—even to myself. The air is colorless like buildings, like four o'clock. The leaves a silent mass plastered on the ground, breathing death, a dark rotting smell envelops me against my will. The slight movements of the tongue in the closed mouth, the visible words of interpretation moving across my brain slow and almost stop. If I did not cover my wrists, my ankles, my neck so well, you would see a man made out of pipe cleaners to please a child. In all this darkness, my white flesh.

My overcoat slides to the floor. I sit up. I look around me. I try simply to remember the origin of these once-soft pajamas, the giver and the gift . . . these rags, a cheap Shakespearian outfit now. I wonder how many years have passed since she . . . But numbers are meaningless. This spirit is young like her. This body belongs in a museum. I shouldn't be lying here. I wonder at life, at being alive. I stand. The mirror leans over me like a disappointed parent, and returns my foolish wonder. I am alive.

In hat and coat, I sit on my one chair like some stage Russian about to quit the set forever. And I breathe, for the last time, the odor of this room. And, almost immediately, I stand. My shoes scrape the wood of my threshold as if I were walking on my own dry bones. And the splinters in the old wall catch noisily at my coat, objecting to my untimely exist. Slowly, carefully, I descend. And the building exhales me at last, body and spirit, with a tiny puff of steam.

"Come outside," she said. "Talk to me in the rain." No, I am not here, these remains under intensive care. I'm . . . !

But don't set their dials off. Don't bring someone poking, feeling. Quiet. Quiet. Thank God you are not in your room. These wires are preferable. Close your eyes. Why do you stare? You're not a bird dog, or an early hunter instinctively intent on something which frightens easily. You are a human being with life, all life, behind you. I close my eyes. As if one could join the living or the dead so easily.

Empty streets, dark rain. Wilderness. Shall I cross the parks one more time? Shall I visit the monuments of our natural history? Her life, like something momentarily alight before me, her large eyes holding a world in silence, her fragile neck . . . An elusive image leaves me through the rain. Her ankles . . . Rain then too. And words, now distant, muffled, as if some nameless part of myself were talking, talking. And I listen. I follow. My footsteps silent in the rain. I cannot stop myself, and I remember. At first she came to listen, to hear the darkness named, and I . . . but no. I remove my mind from the past—an act of will unlikely to be recorded in the history books.

I move on past bison ankle-deep in mud, immobile on the sodden earth as if the great backs against the wire were painted there. The bear's unused claws drag the edge of his concrete ditch, and the stag rubs his antlers silently against the brick, not stopping, not noticing the man who has stopped to notice him. As a grown man, I have begun to wonder . . . to wonder why the book will bear no record of this life. I recall an illustrated volume of *LaSalle's Travels*, a pen and ink sketch: man, standing out against the dark trees, clear-eyed before the great North American wilderness. I lift my head slowly under dripping branches. Years pass.

A dream last night: I, man at the end of his days (my Indian name perhaps), I, man alone, improvising before an unknown class on an unknown subject. What should I be talking about? "Fear in the novels of . . ." Anxiously I search

the blank young eyes. Hopeless. A nonsensical foray or two convinces. They are not listening. Helpless. End of dream. Another: Crystal Lake, she, disappearing mysteriously on water skis, her pubic hair like corn silk through my fingers. And I, unable to rise, sprawled twelve times behind the power boat. Years pass. Dreams converge.

Listen, boys and girls. Afterwards, gasping on the sand where they dragged me out, red-bellied from repeated flops, I felt her eyes on me. And I, crook-elbowed, right side up, assayed the beast's first steps upon the land. To lovely, lovely, laughter. Fools! I have done and not done a thousand times. I have believed and not believed, held and not held. I have gone my way and not gone my way. Yes. I. Me. Here! This man! I who smelled leaves and pumpkins in her hair. It's all here in these unspoken words. It's all here . . . I am still going and not going. I am . . .

A cold drop tracing the wrinkles of the neck, reminds. Rain, soft rain. The rain slides across the void. A few bent, hurrying figures, shadows, gray on gray. Perhaps I will die a comic strip death with crosses in my eyes, my last words rising in a balloon. Even the last act a parody of the thought. No dream now. A bus ride really. Mine, the only soul. These feet jammed against a squeaking fender. Once I had a fear of bus windows falling on my wondrous tiny fingers. But that has lessened. Now other fears . . . the certain future, the uncertain past (this uncontrollable remembering), fear of an improper distance: the girl out of reach, gone; the girl too clear, too close; the girl broken in my arms.

They say old men hate water. It is difficult to urinate. We wake in the dark, drowning. The shriveled foetus whines. Untrue. Untrue. Blessed rain. Drip clear from these strong fingers. In time I left my mark. After the crash, picking my way through splintered glass and imitation mud, my own blood dripping from these still hands I feel such strength,

such satisfaction, in; blood on the shallow mirrored water and on the jagged paper rocks, blood from my childhood, my books, and my last foolish love, taking my place at last among the human animals, raising these grateful hands before the simulated flickering, a plastic caveman's fire, far, far from the hard following footsteps, the frenetic whine of an ambulance, this white room.

I wonder what life was like before . . . without the meaning-giving mind. Was it altogether vacant . . . unrecognizable? Over the hump at Riverview, at the beginning of time I paid my 15¢. Now I ride the Bluebird with the rest, my stomach pressing on my plate. Man on the downside of his mental graph. History passes by. I feel the rushing air. I count the lamp posts on the Outer Drive.

But what is this pain? This pain? Is it not strange that men should die in rooms? Would it not be better to be mangled among strangers by some machine? A public end, a written record with the city clerk. Wet, windblown figures, left in the lurch by my mad driver, scream silently. A phantom bus pulls them together, moving mouths I loved or listened to. Staring out the back, I see them there, on the corners where I left them. Hot bus. Throbbing metal walls. A roar. The rain rises in clean steam from our sides. Is it the train waiting in Northwestern station? Am I off to school again? Who are those two, that couple, standing there? Why do they weep? I move my little fingers on the glass. What's that? My name? The bus droning my name. Turn now. Cover your face. You will not see them again. Men and animals. The individual 'past. All. All.

Memory is a dim room I wander in, holding my head with both hands. I see myself alone, harmlessly clutching the air at the head of those eternal stairs. I listen. I would like to hear her voice. I wait . . . and the silence waits with me. I try to remember a collision in endless halls, her childish laughter,

her breasts . . . My mind slips, banging like a flat wheel in the subway. My heart still thumping when I let her go. On then. Enter here alone. Ask nothing from the past. It is easier, with trembling fingers, to raise the picture of a young boy to my eyes, his tiny hands closing on the high wire behind the bison. Inside myself then too, standing before the great dark American forests, lying awake then too.

(Pause)

The long-winged heron nearly touches his flying shadow on the still lake. I cannot touch the empty boat drifting towards the shore. So slowly. No, I remember all. All! The forests and the lakes, the short spans deciphered on the rotting stone, the upturned faces of forty years, and the unexpected press of a young woman's body against my own. But history does not seem to have been recorded by those left behind. And without this feeling, which will not go into words, what good is it? Words come, but they are not the right ones. I cannot tell this story, even to myself, even now. A young woman preceded me.

I step out on city streets. The wind has risen and the rain stings. I stand still closing my eyes. I remember my mother and my father, and the feel of winter coming on. I remember horses on the snow in Lincoln Park. Expressions, gestures, people in motion as if they were still alive. And then the same location at a later date, unpeopled and unreal. My fists close. I fight a foolish desire to speak their names. Why did they live, these ones I knew? What were they for? Perhaps their bodies, in attitudes of love and defiances, may be found by later generations, sunk like bog-men in the all-preserving dark. The scenes recur. I cannot stop them. Dates, years, clothes of the period (which they wore), headlines, birthdays (which they celebrated), voices (hers).

(Pause.)

Climbing the long steps of the Museum of Natural History, I retrace the bare line of the present. Looking back . . . Grant's Park, Lincoln Park Zoo, the room, the youth, the urban trail I follow here today . . . Secretly, I would have liked to stop it sooner, to keep something, if only a frozen image of our nights and days. Yet even now, at the summit of these stairs, with half the city, this life, just visible through the rain, only words come . . . only words remain.

Entering the grand hall, mentally I time it: late fall, late afternoon, late, very late, in life. Freely, silently, I step among the wondrously poised inhabitants of the American forests. I stand alone in a pool of water by a dark tangle of branches I had not seen before. Her feathers touched up with oils and blood. She does not sing. Turn now. Leave her alone. Rain on the black-painted skylight. At the base of an empty marble staircase, my pool widens, cold and white like moonlight. The long dark Hall of Man. Little drops of water fall silently from the edges of this coat. Rain still beating on a small black-painted window high in the opposing wall. And I am almost safe behind the glass and stone, safe with memories that form and reform, and an image that may never coalesce.

(Slowing.)

On then, enter that darkness. I follow the storied life back towards the beginnings. Little drops of water down a dark hall. Finally, alone, the beginning and the end, I stop, my forehead against the cold glass before the final grouping: wondering, grateful human family, man and fire, man out of the dark night, man and woman.

*(The clock continues a moment,
then stops.)*

John Hall Wheelock

The Art of Poetry XXI



Robert Brewer

John Hall Wheelock passes his 90th birthday in September, 1976. Born in Far Rockaway, New York, he was brought up in the neighborhood now occupied by Rockefeller Center, not far from the present location of Charles Scribner's Sons where he worked as an editor for many years. He spends his summers in the lowland sea-country of Long Island's South Fork—in the background of much of his work—in a house to which he has returned for at least some part of every summer of the past 87 years.

*His first publication was a poem in the Morristown School paper in the year 1900. He has published twelve volumes of his poetry and in 1969, the year after the publication of *The Gardener and Other Poems*, he was awarded the Bollingen Prize. The eight volume series which he edited, *Poets of Today*, 1951-1958, gave first book publication to twenty-four new poets, James Dickey, Robert Pack and May Swenson*

among them. He has also written a prose book, What Is Poetry? (1963). In 1970 he published By Daylight and in Dream: New and Collected Poems 1904-1970. He continues to publish poems in The New Yorker, The Atlantic, Southern Review, and elsewhere. A new volume of poems will be issued in late 1976 under the title, Address to Existence. He is a member of The American Academy of Arts and Letters, a director and former chancellor of The Academy of American Poets and an honorary consultant in American Letters to the Library of Congress.

When we called on him in his New York apartment, the front door was ajar, as he had told us it would be. He was waiting in the dark in a straight-back chair at the end of the hall, silhouetted in gray afternoon light from the living-room beyond; he was dressed formally in a vested suit and tie. He is somewhat stooped and walks slowly using a cane, but he rose immediately to greet us, and insisted on helping us hang up our coats. He ushered us into the living-room and without further ado began to talk about his long life and poetry.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think America could ever produce a poet who would appeal universally to readers with many different levels of erudition? Do you think that such a poet would have to have a strong aural quality?

WHEELOCK

I think it was a Spanish poet—it may have been Calderón—who said that all his life he had been like a swimmer who could only use one arm, because with the other arm he had to hold his poems up over the waters. The things that he really cared about. It's strange, but we live in a world which is even more alienated from poetry than it used to be; most people don't care or know anything about poetry. Most civilized, cultivated people know something about painting, they

go to galleries; they know something about music, they go to concerts; but no one cares or knows anything about poetry except the poets themselves. Since the poets don't expect anyone else to read them, many of them have devised a way of communicating with one another through their poems, and readers often find such poetry difficult. Prose is, of course, easier.

INTERVIEWER

How would you define the difference between prose and poetry?

WHEELOCK

Robert Frost once made a witty definition of poetry. He said: "Poetry is what gets lost in translation." Since every word in a poem is precious, every syllable counts, and every pause gives a certain effect, it's difficult to translate poems, because different languages make different sounds, and words with the same meaning may differ in their associative auras. In fact, so often a great poem is just sheer good luck because the language permits certain effects to be made by someone with long discipline in the use of language, who has a flash in which the words and ideas just fall in a particular way. If you have the instrument in good order, and you've worked at it for a long time, and are disciplined by long practice, even by a lot of five-finger exercises, work that was thrown away—you may be blessed by having things happen that are a little beyond you. "Chance aids the ingenious artist," as Proust has said.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have an example out of your own experience?

WHEELOCK

I learned it very early in life. Once, when I was in college, I went to the theater to see Richard Mansfield acting in *Richard III*. In the tent scene, when Richard is lying there,

with the ghosts—various people he's murdered—speaking to him, I heard one of these voices say, "Sleep on, I lie at heaven's high oriels." I thought, God, what a wonderful line; I wish I'd written it.

It can bother you that you haven't. So, I made up, while I was sitting in the theater—I was with my friend Van Wyck Brooks—a short poem which was eventually published in the *Harvard Monthly*. I used a Latin title, "De Coelo." The epigraph was "Song on a line from Shakespeare." Well, I began to get letters from people who wanted to know where this line occurred in Shakespeare. Among them was George Lyman Kittredge, a noted Shakespearean scholar and my professor in English. He looked it up in the Shakespearean concordances. No such line occurs. In fact, there isn't any line in Shakespeare that begins, "Sleep on . . ." So, when I published my second book in 1912, I simply took out the epigraph. But I *know* that I heard that line! In that theater! One reason I know it was not my line is because I consulted a dictionary to find out that an oriel was a window in a balcony that you could look down from. I had sensed that it was some kind of window, but I didn't know. I looked it up, afraid that it might be the wrong kind of window and wouldn't fit into the poem. Now I have taken that line on as my own, yet no one can convince me that I didn't hear it.

INTERVIEWER

This would suggest that writing poetry involves some sort of mystical property.

WHEELLOCK

Well, making a poem is like having a love affair with yourself. Artists are, in a sense, communing with the "anima," which is the feminine principle in a man, and what is born of this is not a living creature, but a work of art. Of course, some of the best things that you do seem utterly hopeless at their conception. It's hard work on them that brings them around.

INTERVIEWER

Has this been consistently true of your writing, that you had to devote a lot of work after the original conception of the poem?

WHEELOCK

Oh, yes. The Library of Congress has many of my manuscripts of the last thirty years; sometimes there will be as many as fifteen or sixteen versions of a poem. Of course, there is such a thing as carrying it too far. John Butler Yeats, the painter, the father of William Butler Yeats, would start out painting a springtime landscape in April but was so critical that summer would find him still working on it, which required changing it to a summer landscape, and eventually it would end up as a snow scene. He ruined his paintings by working over them too long. You can do the same with a poem. You've got to be the judge of when to stop.

INTERVIEWER

May I ask why you are a poet?

WHEELOCK

I can't think of myself as not wanting very much to be a poet. Of course, "poet" is rather a sacred word, isn't it? Wasn't it Robert Frost who said that no one has a right to say, "I'm a poet" because "poet" is a word of acclaim.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel that your poetry has an available audience? Is this an important consideration?

WHEELOCK

I'll be ninety this September and it's obvious that a man reaching ninety is not likely to be in full accord with the taste of this period. My poetry is primarily a poetry of feeling. Feeling has been rather played down by modern poets, partly as a result of what the world has been through with its depres-

sions and wars. The nerve of feeling has been exhausted. The modern reader will not tolerate a direct attack on his emotions. It seems that even the driest expression of emotion in poetry presents obstacles to readers in key with the mood of these times. So that time, a good deal of time, will have to pass, before my work comes into more general recognition again.

INTERVIEWER

Which writers have influenced you most?

WHEELOCK

Well, I've been fortunate enough, in the course of a long life, to have accumulated memories of writers that go back quite far. I even saw Walt Whitman . . . though being a baby I was not aware of it. My father held me up on a ferry boat—I don't know whether it was going to New Jersey or coming to New York—and said: "Do you see that man?" He turned my head—my mother was with him—toward Whitman, who was standing in the bow of the boat, and he said, "That is the great poet, Walt Whitman." Apparently—as my father described it—I refused to look at him, and kept turning my head the other way. I have no memory of this great occasion, not being then equipped to receive the spirit of Walt Whitman, although I suppose for a moment his image was in my eyes.

The sight of Whitman must have made a great impression on my mother. She was a passionate lover of poetry, and saw to it that my brother and I learned poems by heart, every week a new poem. I took a dislike to poetry at the beginning, when as a six-year-old I was supposed to memorize poems by Longfellow with such lines as "All are architects of fate, working in these walls of time." But the practice gradually infected me with a feeling for poetry which increased as time went on. When I was at Harvard in 1906, I was so influenced by Swinburne that I kept after my father, saying that I wanted to go over to England to see him. My father wasn't very well-

off that year—it was a recession year—but he said, “Well, since you’re so persistent you can go, but you’ll have to go steerage; I can’t afford to send you even cabin class.” I said, “Well, that’s fine with me,” and I went over in the steerage and it wasn’t bad at all. But I made the pilgrimage stupidly; I didn’t get a letter of introduction. All I knew was that Swinburne was living with Theodore Watts-Dunton—a much lesser poet but quite well known as a critic—in “The Pines” in London, in a part of the city called Putney.

So I just went over and hung around “The Pines” for several days. I waited for I forget how many days, and then one August afternoon Swinburne appeared—this very short man wearing a turban—an odd idea, it was very hot—and I was disappointed because he was so short, almost giving the effect of being a dwarf—and he was talking to himself. At that time he must have been about seventy, and, of course, to me, as a youth, he seemed very old. As he came near me I thought I was going to faint, because my heart began palpitating so rapidly that I didn’t know whether I’d be able to make it, I mean walk the rest of the distance without fainting. But I did, and as he passed me I touched his coat with my hand, and I hardly dared look at him. You must remember that I’d been reading Swinburne devoutly and knew many of his poems by heart. He had a very powerful influence on any poet, particularly a young poet, because he has such a marked style; I think after Pope probably the most marked style of any English poet. So, seeing the source of all this verbal magic and music, the poetry that so intoxicated me, was almost like, well, seeing God. I survived it, however, and passed him, and I went back to my room in a small, inexpensive hotel and lay down on the bed and just thought about it all the rest of the day. I went back for several days in the hope of seeing Swinburne again, thinking that I might even have the courage to say a word to him. I’d written him many letters, and also I’d written poems and an essay about him, which came out in *The Harvard Advocate*, and I had sent these to him. But, of course, I added in all my letters, “I would never

forgive you if you answered this. Do not answer it, please.” The *thought* of his being bothered to answer it—it was real hero-worship.

There are one or two other writers I can think of who were a strong influence. Several years after graduating from college, when I was living in New York, Edwin Arlington Robinson, to whom I had sent a copy of my first book, *The Human Fantasy*, invited me to come to his apartment. I say *his* apartment—he was very hard up all his life but he had warm friends, and during the summers he was usually living in the empty apartment of some friend who was out of town. Actually, it was in the apartment of another contemporary, a poet, Louis Ledoux, that I went to see Robinson that evening. A lean, introverted, shy, aloof man. It was very flattering that he had asked me. He sat down at one end of the room and offered me a seat at the other. Everything was swathed in these sheets put over furniture in apartments in summer. The first remark he made was, “I can’t offer you a drink or a cigarette because I have none.” But, we had an interesting talk that influenced me, excited me, because here was a man who by that time had published two remarkable books. Theodore Roosevelt, then president, had taken notice of the second book—*The Town Down the River*, I believe—and had written an article about it in the magazine that he was connected with, *The Outlook*.

INTERVIEWER

You were an editor at Scribner’s from 1926 through 1957—during the time of its great prominence under Max Perkins . . .

WHEELLOCK

When I moved upstairs from the bookstore to become a junior editor, Max Perkins was head of promotion. Max was a man of great individual eccentricities, and a great talent, as it turned out, as an editor. Among his peculiarities, at that time, was the fact that he always worked standing up at a tall lectern; he never seemed to get tired. Also, he often wore a

hat indoors. This protected him to some degree. He had a great many people to see and often at inconvenient times; he could always say: "I'm sorry, but I was just going out," and they would see he had his hat on.

Odd, but Scribner's seemed to have a premium on individualists. One of Perkins' associates was Charles Dunne, a very perceptive editor; he never would take an increase in his salary; he never would dictate a letter or write jacket copy for a book, see a book through the press, or do any of the other duties that fall upon editors. He devoted himself completely to reading manuscripts. He was the first to read the manuscripts that came in. A big pile of them was put in front of him where he sat with his feet on the desk, smoking a pipe. He had such a real sense, not only of literary values but also of what could be sold, that he was a most valuable man; he remained there during most of my editorial career.

But it was Max with whom I worked most closely. For many years I was his lieutenant. My office was moved next door to his, and we had an effective voice in choosing manuscripts. It was a fortunate time when talents were coming along, and we managed to find many books. When Max and I agreed that a book should be published, the process then was to go to Mr. Scribner's office—all the editors would be assembled there—and tell him that this book was one that we recommended. Sometimes he would go along with us, and sometimes not. This Mr. Scribner was Charles Scribner II. His brother, Arthur Scribner, was the other member of the firm, but Mr. Charles Scribner was the dominating one.

INTERVIEWER

Did Mr. Scribner ever turn you down on books that later became important?

WHEELLOCK

Yes. Once or twice books were turned down by Mr. Scribner because he was jealous of keeping his imprint free from anything that seemed unworthy or tasteless. He was a man of

great courage; he would take chances, but there were some things that he was adamant about. When Scott Fitzgerald's first book, *This Side of Paradise*, came in, Mr. Scribner, after reading it, simply did not want his imprint on it. Only our great determination—and that of some of the other editors—that the book should be published made Mr. Scribner change his mind, and only on the condition that Fitzgerald cut and rewrite the book in certain sections. Even then, Mr. Scribner was not quite sure.

The story of *The Sun Also Rises* is more striking. At a meeting in his office, Mr. Scribner said that he did not care to have his imprint on the book. There was a long silence. Max could be very silent and not feel that he had to talk, not even to relieve embarrassment. Max was standing. Mr. Scribner, who was seated at his desk, looked up at him and said: "Max, you haven't said anything. I'm turning the book down. Haven't you got something you'd like to say?" Max finally said, "Yes, I'd like to say this: That if we are going to turn down such a talent we might as well go out of the publishing business. We cannot go on publishing Richard Harding Davis, Thomas Nelson Page, George Cable, Henry Van Dyke, and other worthies. If we're going to be publishers, we have to move along with the talents of the time, even though they may offend . . . well, even though they might offend our kind of taste." Finally Mr. Scribner asked Max: "Will Hemingway change some of the four-letter words? Take them out?" Max said, "Yes, he will take some of them out, I'm quite sure." "Which words will he take out?" said Mr. Scribner. Whereupon Max hastened to his office, got a piece of paper, came back and wrote down the words. Mr. Scribner looked at him (he had a very mischievous sense of humor) and he said: "Max—if Ernest knew that you couldn't say those words, that you had to write them down, he'd disown you!"

INTERVIEWER

I suppose you must have seen a lot of Thomas Wolfe.

WHEELLOCK

Max, of course, saw more of Thomas Wolfe than I did. In fact, Wolfe absorbed so much of Max's time, and indeed of the time of everyone connected with the editorial department, that Mr. Scribner felt he'd have to let him go because other authors resented the excess attention Thomas Wolfe was getting. He slept in the office; he lived there, he was a tremendous talker; he would go from one office to another with this endless flow of language. He was an impetuous, impulsive man who in his normal state of mind, which was most of the time, could be very charming. But when he had a drink or two (and he was rather inclined to drink more as he tired from his tremendous labors), he could be really paranoiac, and almost manic. But the feeling that Max Perkins had for Wolfe as a writer was extraordinary . . . I always felt there was more to the relationship: Max had no son; and he had a strange attitude about women which is hard to reconcile with his courtesy and his affection for his wife, but the fact was he regarded women as inferior; he seemed in some ways to resent them. He could be very severe with his wife. They had five daughters, so he sat down to breakfast with six women. He really longed for a son and he made Tom his son. As you know, Tom in the end betrayed him. Well, "betrayal" perhaps is the wrong word. But in his paranoiac state of mind, he conceived the idea that Max had ruined his books by playing so large a part in editing them and helping him. Max had objected to certain points-of-view in *Look Homeward, Angel* which reflected Tom's interest in communism . . . involving Eugene, the hero of the book, in communist and liberal movements at a time when, according to the background framework of the novel, no such things were going on. Because of this Tom got the idea that Max was an old Tory and was taming his book and had ruined it. He wrote letters to Max that were really dreadful. They were not found until after Max's death because Max was so ashamed of them he had hidden them in his desk. But, as you know, on his deathbed, Tom wrote that famous letter to Max which made all the dif-

ference. He admitted that Max was the one who had made his work possible, and he asked forgiveness and said: "Let's think of the day we walked over Brooklyn Bridge together, and the book had been published, and the first reviews were coming in, and the world with all its glory and beauty lay before us, and we were happy. That's the way I think of you now. I've met the dark man, and I don't think I was too afraid of him. But I know I have to go and I wanted you to get this before that happened."

INTERVIEWER

Did you work with poets as an editor?

WHEELOCK

We had a very fine list of poets at Scribner's . . . Louise Bogan, Conrad Aiken, John Peale Bishop, James Dickey, May Swenson, Allen Tate, and so on. In varying degrees they could be as touchy as Wolfe was with Max. I remember after years of friendship with Louise Bogan she called me up one day at the office and said, "I have a bone to pick with you. Appear, please, at the Child's restaurant at 72nd Street . . ." So I hurried over there, and she belabored me with the most fantastic nonsense: "You never bring me in to Scribner's except by the back door," she said. I said, "I don't know what you mean. There's only one door. You get off the elevator and you're in the editorial department." Well, you never introduced me to Mr. Charles Scribner." I said, "We don't introduce authors to Mr. Charles Scribner. He's a very busy man and he doesn't specialize in poetry or poets, and he hasn't the time to be introduced to authors." "Well, just the same . . . you always brought me in by the back door. You were ashamed of me." I said, "Louise, I don't feel in the mood for quarreling today. If I were going to quarrel with anyone, I think I'd like to quarrel with William Carlos Williams, or maybe with Rolfe Humphries." But her sense of humor had deserted her, and she left Scribner's. She went to a very good outfit run by a man named Cecil Hemley—the Noonday Press. She never came back to

us. My wife and I were very fond of Louise and saw a good deal of her, but she never got over taunting me about our “quarrel”. We’d be up at the Academy and she would be introducing me, and she’d say, “Mr. Wheelock used to be my editor, but we quarreled,” to make me feel silly, you know. She loved to tease. She was partly Irish . . . but then, so am I. So we managed to get along.

INTERVIEWER

Did you write at night after you worked your day as an editor?

WHEELOCK

Yes. I had to, or felt that I had to. I couldn’t resist the desire to make poems, so I made them at night, I made them on weekends. But as an editor, there’s no limit to the work. So after I became senior editor, for many years I didn’t publish a book and I hardly ever wrote a poem. Yet, those twenty years of editing stand as a divide between my lesser work, and my best.

Before I became an editor, I just wrote whenever I got a chance, at night and on vacations. I learned early to do my work in my head. For many years I had a vacation of only two weeks; I would work during that time, walking along the beaches of Bonac and composing poems in my head and all the time revising them, too, in my head. I wouldn’t write down any of them. When I got back to the city, I would write them down when I had the chance.

I know my poems by heart. All the various revisions of them. You work so hard over them, you know, that you never can forget them. I used to give readings from time to time—I can’t do this now—but while I would always have the book there in case I lost my way through nervousness, I rarely had to use it. At night, when I can’t sleep, I can say poems over endlessly. Not mine, necessarily, but any poems that come to mind. It’s a great resource. Yet most poets today are visual. Marianne Moore told me that she didn’t know any of her

poems by heart. Robert Frost knew most of his. But some of the best poets couldn't recite any one of their poems.

INTERVIEWER

Do you try to write every day now?

WHEELOCK

Oh heavens, no. I never did try to do that. Certain things will start a poem in you. It could be something no more important than the sound a broken radiator makes in a room, the knocking of water against pipes, or a murmuring sound, a steady sound . . . the sound of grasshoppers and cicadas in the autumn in the countryside . . . these things will start the feeling of a poem, though the poet doesn't know what's coming or what it's going to be. Or an incident. I was in the street the other day. I walk with some difficulty now, with a stick. A boy rushed into me by mistake shouting, his head back this way . . . rushed right into me so that his arms came around me like this. Almost knocked me over. I thought about that random momentary encounter between two strangers, and in it the possibility of a poem? I didn't know what kind of poem it would be, but I made a note of it in my notebook.

INTERVIEWER

I gather music has been an influence, a source of inspiration.

WHEELOCK

Oh, music is to me the supreme art . . . a revelation of reality. In music you get glimpses of something that you can't put into words, not even in poetry. In fact, music is a bad influence on a poet because listening to music lulls your critical sense. In the euphoria and exaltation of listening to music you are apt to start a poem, which sounds fine until the music stops, and then it is nothing; your critical sense comes back. Music, perhaps, comes nearest to reality . . . the mathematical relationships within the universe made audible. All the arts tend to that, but in music it seems to succeed, at least

for me . . . I don't see how anyone could listen to a Bach fugue without feeling that he's coming as close to reality as possible.

INTERVIEWER

Does the poet have any advantage over the musician?

WHEELOCK

If a poet is really good he can give you a moment of reconciliation to the tragic nature of things. Poetry, as with all the arts, enables us to re-experience. Most of us pass through life in a state of semi-anaesthesia, with life itself blotted out by the business of living. We shut out life itself in order to carry on and survive, and the function of the arts is to pierce that shield and make us suddenly re-experience something that we've always known but haven't been experiencing anymore. Shelley said it when he described poetry as stripping the veil of familiarity from things. It can only be done obliquely or by implication. A certain musical phrase, or combination of sounds by Beethoven, will arouse feelings of intense sadness which would not have been aroused if Beethoven had just put his head down and cried.

INTERVIEWER

Have you been aware of a change in your themes as you have grown older?

WHEELOCK

Yes. I've written a great many poems about age, and about the experience of growing old, and being old. That is natural in going through the experience. I didn't write poems about it until "Song on Reaching Seventy," which seemed to me at the time a vast age. One has no conception, in youth, of what it will be like to be very old—no conception whatever.

INTERVIEWER

It doesn't affect your wanting to write. . .

WHEELOCK

No, it doesn't. Of course, as you get older, the urge to write is less because making poems is tied up with what you experience. As you get old and can't go out very often, being confined to one or two rooms, and all your friends are dead . . . or most of them . . . you see few people . . . you see less of the world . . . there's less experience; and consequently less of what you do with experience.

INTERVIEWER

What's your reaction to today's school of the absurd, to the prevalent cynicism . . .

WHEELOCK

This age is a little bit like the age of Queen Anne or the time of Dryden, when the same state of mind prevailed. Cynicism, disillusionment, and wit take the place of feeling. But I, myself, don't feel cynical or disillusioned about life. It has been a tremendous experience. To be conscious is a great privilege, and it's only maintained by the most enormous effort . . . think of the work that the heart does, and all the other organs, coordinated like an orchestra to maintain this little thin film of consciousness; the cessation of any of these activities or any of them getting seriously out of order, and consciousness is gone. I think about growing old a great deal. In one of my longer poems, "Night Thoughts in Age," I record the thoughts of an aged man sleeping in a room which he had occupied as a child and then later as a boy, and as a youth and as a grown man, and feeling the beauty of the place and the presence of all the beloved people, no longer alive, who had lived there.

Everything is in flux. Our places are taken by others. The generations can't be poured into one lifespan. It almost seems as if time was an invention to make it possible to provide space for more to come, and with them their poetry.

—WILLIAM CAHILL

—MOLLY McKAUGHAN

Conclusions

Stephen Dixon

Okay. We're finished, done. My head careens, heart flops. She clenches her teeth, whirls her back to me, says "Just go. Please? Will you just leave?" I think of my brother's grave. Looking at her back: I don't know why the grave's what popped to mind. Where is it again? Oh yes. On Long Isle. Been a long time. Long time no see we used to say about other things, among other things. What it must look like now. Overgrown like my own head hair. "Then I'll go then," she says. Though it's her house. Her small bright once rented recently bought old stone house. Her child's inside. Her twelve year old girl and two year old cat. Her furniture and diverse work appurtenances. Her dog, car and garden in back. All I got inside is half a dresser drawer I share with her sheeting and on the washstand my razor and tooth-and shaving brush. Though the garden's mine in the sense that I rented it from rubble and trash. And have been watering, weeding, singly though not exclusively tending it. Turnips. That's only one of some twenty roots and legumes I've

planted there. White radishes another. Two rows of each plant and all ripe for picking now. In fact I've picked plenty. Pickled plenty also, as nobody here but me likes them cooked in any of the many ways I've learned to prepare them or even sliced thin into salads or cut in half and concaved with a cheese dip in them on a plate of mayonaised carrot and parsnip sticks and other hors d'oeuvres. "Boooo, turnips and radishes," Linetta usually says. "You and your roots picturesquely heaped up to us in a thousand awful ways," Mary's said. Mary's left. She did say "Then I'll go then." But go from her own house? Temporarily she must have meant. But she's nowhere in sight and I want her to hug me as I hug her and apologize. I think I know what I'll say. I'll blame my infantile egotistical outburst and attack on her on the book I've been reading which blames just about all of man's infantile egotistical outbursts and attacks, genocide or any otherwise, on his almost constant repressive fear of death. "Em?" I call into the house.

Linetta, looking like an old photo of her mother looking out of a similar livingroom window, looks out the window overlooking the screened in porch. "Mom went through the house and out the back way in a tough."

"You mean a huff."

"No, she looked tough. I don't know what that is your huff."

"Come on, you remember—to huff and to puff. And I think to huff is to puff, though to puff tougher than your ordinary puff. Huff. H-u-double f. Something to do with loud empty threats or being vexed. Consult my new Third New International you use as a piano stool boost."

"I wouldn't use it for anything if you'd remove as you promised the piano casters and their trays."

"For you I'll gouge out four holes in the floor or saw off a small part of each piano leg."

"You think you're funny but you're not. Just take off the casters and trays."

"You're right. I'm not. Or I wasn't. And I will." I blow

her a kiss and go through the house and out the back way though not in a puff, huff or tough. Mary's not there. Her car and my garden are. This morning I manured it all. After that I tarred the entire roof because Mary, who's said she only fears death when she fears for her life from open heights, complained last night of leaks all over the top floor and not enough pots and jars to catch the interior drizzles and insomniac drop by drop drips. Early afternoon we took down the basement's false ceiling and denailed the now exposed beams so the room could ultimately become Linetta's TV and slumber party area and with a divider Mary's potting studio. Then I snapped the long wood slats in half with my shoes and the halves in threes and twos and made a couple dozen bundles of firewood from them which I stored under the front stairs. "A winter's supply of kindling, not firewood," Mary said when she saw it, "That, you and I still have to find and chop for the next national energy bind," affectionately compressing my cheeks between her two thumbs and kissing my fish lips. I said "Sounds so much like children—kindling—but small-kindred children, kinda kind kindergartners kindling sounds like wouldn't you kinda say? But wouldn't you kindly consent to our kinda kindling one another in your single kindred beds?" "Right now? We're both too grubby and bushed." We looked like bandits. Blue bandannas over our noses and mouths and knotted in back, her hats protecting our hair and foreheads, coal miner grime rings round our eyes. I said "That's good. It'll be like making love in the mud." We didn't. She wanted to shower and shave, then draw me drawing her in her new studio as she sat on her kiln in front of her old just hung self-portraits and with her feet on the potter's wheel. She went upstairs. I thinned out the rutabaga sprouts, went to the bathroom to wash. All steam. She was in the shower and she said sudsing her underarm hair "You know I like total privacy in here." "I only came in to wash." "You could have done that at the kitchen sink." "I didn't want to dry myself off with a rancid dishcloth or paper towels and I also wanted to brush the basement muck from

my mouth.” Argument. It led to. My hostility. My scorn. My ego arrogance disguised by the humble role. Our arguments. Getting more numerous and humorless and much worse she also said. Her ex-husband. “You dislike Myles mainly because I was so committed to him and can’t be that way with anyone again including you.” “Kootchy kootchy koo with his Gucci Gucci shoes.” “Dumbo.” “You got me pegged.” “At least he didn’t bait and suffocate and pester me to death as you do. Now will you get out?” “Oh. The discussion’s finished when you say it is. But I still think your attitude about having total privacy in here is unreasonably selfish considering the circumstances. After all, I busted my ass for you today.” “Okay. You want to have it out, we will. But somewhere else after I finish my shower, as I don’t want to slip and break my neck in the tub. And I’ll be swallowing none of your martyring. I don’t want anyone fulfilling their life and focusing their needs and working out their inner conflicts and contradictions through me.” I left. Out front I fumed. I kicked a wall. I threw over a lawn chair. She came downstairs and said she sensed tremendous tensions from me and was a little afraid of what I might do to her. I said don’t be for I was all right and whatever tensions she sensed were all in her head. She said “But I can still feel and see it, so how could I be so wrong?” “You’re not.” “So why’d you say your tensions weren’t there and try to make me seem like the crazy?” I said “Stuff it.” She said “Well you’re the one who forced this talk.” I grabbed her upper arms. She screamed for me to let go. I would have but it seemed she’d swing at me first chance after I released her and I tightened my hold. She yelled “You know I can’t stand being physically held down or back” and kicked and scratched at my chest and arms till she got free. I yelled “Selfishness, phoniness, woman of a hundred faces, fifty different voices, sometimes I hate your guts.” “Good.” Slap. “That’s it. That is it,” she said. “The windup for all time. Don’t you ever touch me again. Never come near me. We’re finito forever, brother. Tongue-tied and mad as Myles got he never hit me and in my whole life

my folks never once even threatened me with their hands. We're finished, done."

I think of my brother's grave. Now it seems more logical why. Finito. Forever. Way out on the island a hundred or so miles from here. Only routes over superhighways or a sluggish bus to the big city and from there a tedious train trip and long cab ride to the grave. I'd need a car. I don't have a car. She does. There it lies. Convertible, plucky VW, I'd wear the stylish shades she bought to modernize me, it's a sunny open-top day. But she'll never loan the car now. Earlier today she might have said "You betcha, lover, and if you want I'll come too. We'll make it a day. Late lunch, dusky swim, Linetta loves both those two shores." But that was then. Keys in the car: today she'd send the police after me. But I'd like to see the grave. Clean it up. Weed it. Its bills haven't been paid. If that goes on too long, do they remove the casket and monument and then fill in and reuse the grave? To leave several pebbles on the headstone as is our custom for all the times I've never been there. But no casket. He's not even down there. Binny went down in some ship never sighted again or found. Just a life saver with the name of the ship Eerie washed up on a Norwegian fjord beach. But my folks had the yews and stone planted with what words or word's on it again in parentheses under his name? *Inter Vivos* or *Nolle Prosequi* perhaps. *Causa Sui* comes to mind. But the exact birthdate and just the month and year of his death and at the foot of the grave a granite bench bearing the family name. Gravesite with enough plots to accommodate a soccer team and its water boy, my dad used to say. Though the folks, now dead, never made it there as was their express wish. No mystery. Died in a European car crash and soon after a bulldozer pushed the charred car off the narrow mountain road into the unreachable ravine below. Thought the ashes had already been removed. Mistakes are made. Many. Repeatedly. Mine with Mary before for example. Shouldn't have said what I said. Tongue-tie yourself, dumbo, I should have advised myself. She's in mourning. Her surviving parent. Sole relative

save her child. Second saddest period in her life, she said. Lots of ups and downs and backs and forths between us recently, but that's nothing new. Why the slap though? Trying out catharsis for size? Now it's done. Finito forever, brother. This time I don't think she'll come back as the seven or either other times I'll remember and could relate. No hugs of renewal, teary regrets, subsequent sex to seal our bond. End to all our ends. But why twelve? I asked. My dad said "For your two brothers and sister and folks and anyone else in the clan like uncles and aunts or wives or your sister's husband if she can never catch one or even old hobos if you meet them and I'm dead then who haven't a final rest home of their own."

"Em?" I shout. "You in there, Em?" Behind the garden and parking road is a state forest and a few feet inside it is a hiker's trail that continues for a thousand miles each way north and south. I choose right, her favorite direction for short walks, and hike along it for a while. If I see her I'll throw my arms out and apologize. I don't want to leave. I'll even get down on my knees and rout out a good cry. Real tears. I'll feel them too. I feel them now. She was always moved by my tears and maybe the one thing I've held back from her these two years is how easy it is for me to draw them up. I smell wild onions. I see the sassafras tree I once hunted down and made a medicinal tea for her out of its dried roots. Those are trilliums. That's a scarlet tanager. Above it cumulonimbi. So why can't I revive those words or that word again that describes my brother's absence from his own grave? *Dominus Litus* or something. *In Situ*? I know it's not *In Absentia* and Benjamin was his real given name. Our sis never made it to the site either. We donated her to science, just as she'd instructed us, but were later told she had no useful organs they could then use. Last time I saw her she weighed 55 to 60 pounds the doctor said, though her condition was too delicate to have that guess confirmed. "Why me, why me, why me, Newt?" were her antepenultimate words to me and I said "We all have bodies." Maureen. She was 23. Died on her birthdate. "Full cycle," she said. We both

broke down, she because of her pain. "Order them to give me more morphine," and I left her room. Nurse said she'd see what she can do. She went in. Doctors and more nurses summoned on the double to Maureen's room. Same thing to me: "Please do not go in there for the time being." Then nurse came out and said "Your wife is dead." I said "My sister." "Your sister?" "My baby sister." "Then I'm sorry, but your sister is dead." That moment my folks stepped out of the elevator and walked towards me down the hall. I've also another older brother who ran away from home when he was eleven and hasn't been heard from since.

I've walked and run about a quarter mile on this trail. A hiker approaches. "Hi," she says.

"Hi hiker," I say. "You perchance pass a young dark-haired woman wearing a pair of white short shorts?"

"Five minutes ago, going the opposite way. She didn't look like a hiker though."

"Her clothes?"

"Also no equipment and that face. So agitated and depressed. And walking too fast for a hiker and looking as if she wasn't going to stop unless she was tackled or till she dropped or fell. I asked her 'Anything the matter, honey?' and she said yes. 'Then anything I can do then?' when she just kept on walking and she said 'No thanks but no.' Her exact words. Just now I was still trying to figure out what she might've meant. Something drastic must have happened to her. But now I got to get moving again if I'm going to reach the Nyock hostel by dark."

"You'll make it. It's only four miles from here and you really seem to keep a brisk pace."

"I'm tired though." She goes. The sun is half past its downward phase. Looks like I'll never be able to catch up with Mary at the speed this woman said she was going, and the cemetery will be closed even if I did steal her car for the day. I could look at the grave from the road right outside the cemetery gates, but it isn't the same thing. I want to sit on the bench. Hold my head in my hands and maybe say some

words. But why look or go? I don't pray and what words would I say? Oh father whose art is heaven?—no way. And there's nobody down there—not even a box. Be more sensible going to the ocean or even down to the wide river running past Mary's town. There's more where Binny might be than any gravesite. I return to the house. "Find mom?" Linetta says.

"No. And I'm going now, sweetheart," I say.

"Does that mean I'll never see you again?"

"We'll see each other again. After the summer. Of course we will. Even if it's got to be just you and me." She's watching TV. An educational television children's news and special events program where the kids who moderate and host the show speak mostly in a language where every vowel has before it the letter P. A child on the screen is talking in that language now. I don't understand much of it after overhearing it for about a year. Mary and Linetta have held long dinner conversations in it and wouldn't pass me the wine or bread till I asked for it in P. I kiss Linetta's head. She says "Gpopodpype, Npewtpipe."

"Gpopodpype, Lpinpettpa, and spee ypopu spoon. A little wrong, I know, but you know what I mean."

I leave the house and walk down to the river. I look at the river. I take my shoes and socks off and wade in the river. I take my shirt and pants off and jump in the river. I swim in the river. A man comes to the riverside and says "You can't swim in that river. One thing you're nude, and the other it's polluted."

"No it's not."

"But everybody knows it is. Scientific reports and studies both federal and state have declared it polluted. You can get sick with all sorts of microbic diseases from swimming there besides getting picked up by the police. You should come out right now."

"And you should come in here right now."

He walks away. I continue to dunk, splash and swim. I don't feel free of her yet but I at least feel refreshed.

Herbert Morris

NEWPORT, 1930

Stepping deftly to the jetty,
members of the boating party,
women in pearls, long skirts, cloche hats,
men in blazers, white yachting flannels,
slickers dangling from an arm,

walk the ramp to the misty shore.
The sand is grey, the water greyer,
the light is a queasy off-grey color
depriving everything of shadow.
The time must be late afternoon,

the day unlike the day in summer,
given the variables, it must be.
Crews from the offshore yawls and sloops,
maneuvering small white-hulled tenders
ferrying members of the party,

are dressed as that year's crews are dressed,
are seen to do what ships' crews do.
Though their hands are unseen by us
(the distance, yes, but greyness, too)
we are given to understand

(I cannot yet fully explain it)
nowhere will they prove less than equal
to whatever is asked of them:
hold to the wheel, haul port, trim starboard,
cast these members ashore, man stations.

A small flag flutters from the stern of
each of the auxiliary tenders.
Could we count the stars splattered on them
we could, within specific limits,
narrow the context, taste the year.

Of the life of those party members
put ashore on the coast of twilight,
walking in twos in that evening
where the evening is spread before them
like the fall of a women's hair,

what can I say but that this woman
after the dusk has fallen, late,
somewhere not far from sea-routes, sailor,
where the choices pertain to voyage,
lets down her hair as dark as water;
that the man who accompanies her,
armed with a slicker against her sheer downpour,
soon, with the night and tide propitious,
sails out on what, not far from here,
the woman has let down like water;

that the hands of the crew, no matter
how astonishing that insight
into the reach of their commitment,
in the long darkness founder, crumble,
finger by finger leak with dust.

From the balustrade we view them
moving together into contexts
of which we have nothing but outlines:
fleets in the bay riding at anchor,
tenders plying their final runs,

the first stars tangled in the rigging,
belowdeck crews taking their suppers;
that entering on darkness, darkness
the absence, voyager, of shadows,
that letting down, somewhere, of hair.

David Lehman

FEAR AND TREMBLING

for Ed Byrne

'All find safety in the tomb'—Yeats

Unable to distinguish between flying and falling
With a feeling of splendid contempt and with a strange
 loving longing
In my eyes, I look up at the helicopter that was lately
 my home
Getting smaller and smaller in the sky, and I know this is
A routine enough condition for a veteran parachutist
 like myself.
Yet always, in those free-falling fast and furious seconds
Before the chute blossoms open, turning me into a human
 umbrella
Or, as I sometimes like to think, an uprooted tree with
 a cloud
For a skullcap, I feel like the first time all over again.
In love with the panic of 32 feet per second per second
Which only silence can master, and which is nothing compared
To the trembling possibility that I will fail to jump out
Or be unable to keep my eyes open, but I have even
 managed that.
And now what frightens me is not so much a doubt
Of salvation as not knowing for sure whether a secret wish
Of my own, rather than a fluke or an act of god, is to blame
For the refusal of my chute to work when I pull the cord.
Which is the culprit, Thanatos, shoddy merchandise, or
 divine
Revelation? I ask myself, feeling inside me the awakening
Of a familiar hunch, more potent than any merely human
 decision.
That somehow, anyhow, I will swing into a survival
All the more secure for appearing impossible beforehand.

All the more desirable because never consciously pursued.
So, at any rate, I tell myself, when compelled by a necessity
Only half understood, to relinquish a marriage, even a lousy
one,

An ambition, even a stupid one, a god, even a dead one,
Or any other long lost, once loved cause that sold my kisses
For thirty tablets of Valium. Or do I court these disasters
Intentionally, seeking an excuse for loud lamentation
That needed no excuse? Is the exhilaration worth the dread
Of these threats to my guts? The answer to these questions
And others is as easy as grasping the secret of last night's
dream

Tonight, just before going to sleep, too tired to get up
And write it down, sure you won't forget, but you always do
The next unreal morning; and as hard as remembering
What year it is, especially in January, though
For some this problem extends throughout the Winter
And to Winter herself, and the surprising tenacity with which
The snow-cruised branches of her amputated trees resist
The arrival of Spring each Spring. Hard too to let your
childhood

Go, and easier by far being the father of someone else's kids.

Two Poems by Greg Kuzma

AGE

*"You will lie down with others."
—old saying.*

Because you cannot be alone all of the time
you will lie down with others.
Because you cannot be hoarding each moment
and keeping it, reserving it for yourself,
when all around you the people are eating eating
even the air,
you will lie down with others at the end.

Because your children in their very walking home
encounter the knife edge of strangeness
and ever after bear these razored wounds
and bleed bleed bleed
notwithstanding your upbringing or entreaties
your love or hope or charity for them
notwithstanding
you will come unto a strange country yourself
and rub across it languageless.

Because you are old, because your bones
don't seem quite at home anymore in your skin,
because the walk you took last night
restored not a carefree mood but rather
the usual misgivings and uneasiness,
and because you so lately bear up less and less
well, and can do so very little for yourself,
though you consider yourself nonetheless
dauntless, indefatigable,
you will lie down with others soon,
you will pass down a row of hands,
you will be attended.

Even the sea is put to bed.
Even the cliffs along the shores look both ways.
Even the blur of the leopard descends
unto the refuge of flesh.

Because the very nature of art is questioning
even your statements will draw answers back.
Flies turmoil about the afterbirth
my dog today neglected briefly to eat the pup.

Because you are at least so many people
what with your demons, your aspirations,
and all of the various ways you excel,
you cannot, should not be, swallowed up.
But still you must.

AFTER THE HORSE

“Locking the barn after the horse is stolen”

I have closed to the barn door
now that the horse is stolen.
I have stacked and restacked the hay bales
now that the horse isn't here
to kick them over and over.
Out in the fields I have let the grass grow
taller than usual
on account of the horse's not being around.
The turds of the horse now gone, stolen
out of the barn I should have locked,
blaze in the pasture duller and duller.
Soon entirely gray and mudlike they will
seem entirely to belong here, fading.
The day will come that they no longer will
remind me at all of the horse.

I have gone into town, now on foot,
with the horse missing, no longer under me.
I have gone unto the blacksmith shop,
I have gone unto the hardware store
and asked and asked
to fashion me a lock.
A lock of brass and steel and bronze
with a big clamp on it,
and a flange and hook,
to set across the neat crimp of the door
and wall, where they, closed now, meet
clean and true,
the way I should have always kept them shut.
And I have closed the lock.

Another Form of Marriage

Maxine Kumin

They were touring New England, escaped lovers in mid-June, when the signs sprang up, hand-lettered in red and green on shiny white boards. *5 Miles to Skyvue Strawberry Farm!* the first one proclaimed, followed in due course by *Skyvue Strawberry Farm, 1 Mile on Left* and *Pick Your Own at Skyvue Strawberry Farm 10 to 4*.

"Let's," she said, squeezing the brown corduroy of his knee.

"But what will we do with them?" he said, thinking of tonight's motel somewhere in the Champlain Valley and tomorrow's drive down the Hudson to their separate suburbs. He would leave her at the train station just as he had last year, and the year before, and the year before that. As if she had ridden the local out from Grand Central, she would take a taxi home.

"Eat them. Take them home. Oh never mind!" she despaired. She had caught sight of herself at the taxi stand,

strawberries spilling out of her shopping bags.

But he had downshifted from fourth to third and then at the last declarative sign, *Strawberries Are Rich in Vitamin C*, to second. They turned in at the driveway, rose up a winding dirt road, and were there.

They had come from the translation seminar held each summer at a small college in the Adirondacks. He specialized in Hungarian, which was not, however, his native tongue. Always from the bottom of his suitcase he took out the two volumes of his German-Hungarian dictionary. These stood on the bureau, on a succession of bureaus on stolen weekends throughout the year, grave necessary friends of their liaison. She spoke no foreign language, but served the conference as administrative assistant, cutting stencils each morning, collating pages of prose and poetry in bilingual arrangements. She saw to it that the original always appeared on the left-hand page so that the work under discussion might lie as flat as an open-face sandwich.

That first summer she had come to the conference unexpectedly, filling in for an ill colleague. She was a shyly attractive woman in her thirties, tallish and slender with long brown hair that she wore tucked discreetly into a knot at the nape of the her neck. It was rainy and raw; she had not brought warm clothing and the man who was not yet her lover had loaned her a comforting maroon ski sweater in which, he assured her, she looked properly waif-like. It smelled of his brown tobacco cigarettes tinged with camphor. When he smiled, she was dazzled by one off-center gold tooth. She began wearing her hair loose about her shoulders and in town she bought a pair of dangling imitation-gold earrings. He came to her room the fourth night, whistling nonchalantly up the stairs of the old brown building, a sheaf of papers in his hand. Raindrops had peppered his beret and she propped it on the radiator to dry. But the papers were in Spanish, five versions of a Neruda poem left over from that morning's workshop and out of his mackintosh pocket there came a bottle of cognac. At dawn, holding his shoes, he went lightly down the fire escape onto which, luckily, one of her

windows opened.

A highway bisected the campus. Porches of the college buildings overlooked it and words were often lost in the drift of traffic. Snatches came through: "Do you see this as an exercise?" "Do you set yourself models?" "The basic concept is very good, really very good. . . ." Logging trucks passed in both directions, confusing her. Those great prehistoric-looking tree trunks, stacked like her sons' Playskool toys, rattled past in their chains. Perhaps there were sawmills at either end of this mountain gap? The process of overlap struck her as an apt image for translation.

Skyvue Farm provided its own boxes; wax-lined cardboard trays, really, for picking. What he was to do with the damn things was another story. They could be given away, he supposed. Bartered against the motel bill, a hundred miles down the road? The view, or *vue*, if you will, was truly incredible. To the west, spruce- and pine-covered hills the color of bleached denim. East, looking into the determined sun of Vermont, three small, connected ponds with ducks on them. And stretching its plateau in a commodious rectangle of what he took to be easily ten acres, this expanse of strawberry field still swallowing up its odd assortment of human forms as people entered, were assigned their rows, and sank to their knees or buttocks. Some few more or less leaned down, rumps high, and dug their hands into the plants, or rested one palm on the earth for equilibrium as they picked.

He was forty-five this year, his life was flawed and sedentary, he groaned, folding himself down. The berries adorned the plants tritely. He resented the dew that added diamonds to their rubies. How monstrous the fruit were, the ripest ones leaving behind a little white cone on the plant as they pulled away from the calyx. In Austria the strawberries grew elusively in the meadows and he was forced out into the fields each morning with the other young ones to crawl through prickly grasses and fill his pail. Mosquitoes sang in his ear. His mother would fly into a rage if he scanted on the picking. Once, invoking his father at the Front, she beat him with a shoe. Those wild strawberries, he remembered, were long

and cylindrical and hung from the creeping vine like sows' teats. He tasted salt and wondered if he had been crying. No, it was sweat. Or did it matter? He mopped his face with a handkerchief and sat down between rows. Memory was exhausting in full sun.

Often there had been no bread in the bakery and no flour in the house to bake with. Now, whipped cream rose up in mountains on his strawberry shortcake. Now he had a wife and half-grown children, the oldest to enter college that fall. And in the mountains, a mistress—dreadful old-fashioned word! What was he but an old-fashioned, fastidious middle-aged linguist?—a mistress only slightly younger than his wife and a history, going on four years now, of stolen weekends. It came to him that he had pretended more translations than he had effected. Each one sweetened the months of fidelity that followed.

It was a hot morning and promised to be a hotter day. She had picked well past him, turned, and had started greedily back still another row so that now she was coming toward him in a series of little frog-hops. He saw her thighs flash white, those strong stems he had lain athwart only a few hours ago. And her fingers pinching here, there, so decisively nipping the best berries; yes, he would nip and pinch and comfort and take hold. Now she was closer, now clearly he could see the gray streaks she lamented were overtaking her hair. How luminous, that chestnut mane, against the sun! Their quarrels were sharper each year, their reconciliations almost unbearably poignant. His wife was paler, larger, a milder version. Against his will he remembered the rented summer cottage at the shore when the children were small, how his wife served him berries with cream for a late night snack, moving furtively about the unfamiliar kitchen, whispering over his bowl. He could hear the click of his spoon on the crockery and knew afterwards exactly how they had bedded, he stroking the back of her neck first. Oh, he was a detestable person, he deserved neither woman, he told himself, even knowing the thought was an act of self-congratulation.

Meanwhile in the strawberry patch he was sentenced to

overhear just behind him a tale of loyalty, of a man standing by his wife struck down by multiple sclerosis or cancer, he could not tell from the medical details. In any case, incapacitated, her condition unchanging. Two women, local, he guessed from their accents, harvesting berries for their freezers, jellies, pies, were exchanging the details of this story. She had fainted on the commode, she spat blood, he still took her on fine days for drives, tucking her wasted body about with pillows. Only in Purgatory was one doomed to hear such tales of domestic heroism.

Now the woman who was not his wife had drawn abreast of him and saw from the passivity of his shoulders that she was making him unhappy. In that Buddha pose she would have kissed the worry lines from the corners of his mouth. Instead, displaying the half-filled box, she begged, "Just five minutes more." He smiled evasively, a cocktail party smile of dismissal and moved forward in his row. They squatted there, back to back, her fingers travelling expertly over the plants while she reflected on their stolen weekends.

She could name them all sequentially, passing quickly over the rainy one in Indiana where they had fished in the St. Jo River full of disgusting carp and then drunk themselves into a sodden state in the one downtown hotel. He had pushed her beyond her limits, dark anger had flowed out of her like blood clots, and passion, equally ungoverned, rushed in. Never in her other life had she been an extremist. Now she recorded impressions with her stomach, her skin. The mind came last of all in this procession. It had begun with the glint of gold in the mouth of an elegant foreign man, but where would it end? She could recall especially the grit and detritus of New York City, where they met often, the enforced gaiety of its bars gleaming metal and dark at noon. Once there had been dinner at the Russian Tea Room where an old man at the next table, knowing them for conspirators, palpably, lovingly fondled them with glances. He and the translator had conversed in German.

Out of town she remembered there were chains of look-alike motels where air conditioners exhaled noisy droplets and

overhead fans started up in windowless bathrooms at the flick of a light switch. The toilets wore Good Housekeeping seals of paper bands. She swore and paced the corridors while he was gone or else sat for hours in a hot tub as if hoping her skin, that pimple, would burst.

She bit into a deformed strawberry swollen almost to plum size. It was mealy but wet as the earth was wet to her fingers, as the plants were furry with their cultivated bristles. Spiders clambered up the wisps of straw that had been spread as mulch between rows and spun and fell and labored again to renew their torn webs.

Bits of conversation drifted down her row. Even here, the talk was of ungrateful teen-age children, of dying parents, sick animals. She felt a dull astonishment. In this whole Breughel scene of people bending, kneeling, plucking, in this landscape of bobbing colors and anatomies, a terrible banal sameness prevailed. It was the sameness of the human condition. She had come to put her hands into the dirt, to taste her fruit in the full sun. For even in these carefully tended furrows to which the pickers were directed by the farmer's sharp-faced wife dressed in her strawberry-dotted pinafore, even though the hybrid berries had been force-fed to this size and drenched, midway in their span, with insecticides, they were more real than their counterparts in supermarket boxes, plasticked over and fastened shut with rubber bands.

Her legs and back ached. She had come impulsively, she now saw, licking the strawberry juice from her fingers, to put the wildness back in this dear red fruit. At the expense of the man she adored, who was fluent in five languages and whose starved childhood had been stained with this sort of foraging.

What was this affair but another form of marriage? Instead of being faithful to one man, she was faithful to two. Her husband was industrious and kindly and a bit unkempt. She remembered she had loved his ragged beard, his abandon with clothing, the way he wore his pipe, still smoldering, in his back pocket. When his shoestrings broke, he knotted

them. When she closed her eyes she saw him, young and laughing, his arms full of their two boys, a tangle of hair and beard and arms and legs. The red dots of strawberries behind her eyes brought back that time, ten years gone, her standing stirring at the stove, him slicing bread, the little ones leaning on their elbows at the table waiting to taste the hot jam. "Will it jell?" they had asked, using their new word. "Will it ever jell?"

Everything jelled, filled its spaces or found new spaces to flow into. Thus she had come, willy-nilly, to adore a tidy professor whose suitcase was meticulously packed, his shaving lotion in a plastic bottle, his shirts in see-through bags fresh from the laundry, a man who carried his dictionaries about with him like religious statuary.

She rose, dusted herself off, and together the lovers, each encumbered with his tray, stood in line to have the fruit weighed. "Boxes or bags?" the pinafore woman asked impatiently. It came to ten pounds worth, two brown bags full, which they set on the floor of the back seat and covered with the *New York Times* as the coolest place in the car.

All that day and the next the berries ripened and ran together in their twin bags, giving off a smell of humus and fermented sugar. All that day and the next, winding their way downstate from Mecca, the guilty pilgrims breathed in that winery richness and did not speak of it. In the twilight of the last twenty miles along the Taconic State Parkway they sat very close, she with her left hand sorrowfully on his knee, he with his right hand nuzzling hers in her lap. At the last rest area before the turn-off to her suburb he swerved wordlessly, pulled up to a green trash barrel and stopped the car. "Yes," she said. "I know," she said. And he divested them both of the bloody evidence. Then he took her to her train station and kissing her goodbye, drove his tongue between her teeth like a harsh strawberry and she clung to him, this other man, this vine which had taken root and on which she ripened.

Two Letters from Frank Crowther*

May 13, 1976

Dear Norman,

I just wrote Joe Flaherty a note, and he'll probably call you.

But, at the last minute (and this is surely that), I couldn't check out without sending you a last note.

I've been reading Baudelaire's Last Poems (1859-63), and stopped after *Le Voyage* and *Anywhere Out Of The World*. They mean different things to different people (especially the author), but I saw some of myself in them. I sure as hell wish I'd written at least one or two things as good. . . .

Before checking out, I merely wanted to say a personal farewell and wish you all the best. If there's some way you can sneak the big novel over to the 'other side,' give it a try. It would be something fine to carry off into eternity.

So long, old man. Keep giving them hell.

Good luck and God bless,

Frank Crowther

P.S. One final thought. If you wouldn't mind, when you have a chance, I'd appreciate your dropping my father a note. I worry, as would any son, how he's going to take this. I had a

*Frank Crowther became an Associate Editor of this magazine in 1969.

good life, a good shot at things, and I leave with almost no regrets. It wasn't anything to do with my parents, God knows. They were always loving and kind to me. I just had some bad luck, that's all, and chose this way of departure rather than lingering and getting worse by the day. It might help him through what will undoubtedly be a bad time. . . .

He wrote other letters that day to Wes Joyce, proprietor of the Lion's Head where he drank, and to Joe Flaherty the writer who lived in the same house as himself. The letters were all postmarked at three in the afternoon. That evening he went to the Lion's Head, drank quietly, said little, and studied the faces of Joyce and Flaherty who were also at the bar and would receive his letters in the morning. Then he went home and took an overdose of pills and died in his tidy apartment, dead before he was 44. A number of us went to his funeral. Being asked to speak, I read aloud from his letter. I confess I had read the letter twice before I realized what it said, and so I tried to explain that Crowther lived, more than any friend I knew, by an idea of style. When style is a way of life rather than a literary act, it has only the modern fundament on which to base itself—grace under pressure. It is probable that Frank had more pressure in the last two years of his life than anyone I know, and he was not necessarily prepared for it; his early career had been an easy and attractive one. He had four years in the Marine Corps with two of them at the American Embassy in Paris, followed by a good campus career at the University of North Carolina, and then a stretch of nine years in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and with Roger Stevens on the White House staff when the National Endowment for the Arts was being forced. He was that rarest of career men, a literary functionary on the national level, and it gave him a certain blandness. He was, in the years I first knew him—we would run into one another at Plimpton's parties—a well-built, pleasant-featured slightly round-faced acquaintance, with a half-agreeable, half-promiscuous heartiness, and a great knowledgeability of the activities of everyone in the literary world. I doubt if he missed reading a single issue of any magazine relevant to those times and those people. He was up on every bit of gossip. It was easy not to take him seriously, and I remember my surprise at discovering in 1971 when he came to visit in Provincetown, that Crowther was more of a literary man than I had realized, and had the passionate love of good writing you expect to find in people who have high literary ambitions but know agonies in trying to set it down.

After that, we were friends of a sort, and came closer when he managed my Fiftieth Birthday Party at the Four Seasons (where I announced the need for a Fifth Estate in a sixth-rate speech) and if the affair had any success at all, it was in Frank's skill at getting people to believe that my birthday party was the place you wanted to be seen on that night, a piece of social legerdemain when you consider the not wholly cordial reputation of the principal.

A year later, more or less, he was ill. Sick with a most mysterious and maddening disease. His skin turned red, peeled, and itched intolerably. He lived in the cauldron of a body that itched for twenty-four hours a day. The skin of his hands turned as red as the shell of a boiled lobster. His weight went down. His round face turned thin, and his gray eyes had the imploring light of a man who dwelt in unremitting torture. He was in and out of hospitals. They tested him for every cancer they could find—they found none; for every common and exotic disease of the skin—they found none. He managed to write during this period and did a screenplay which came close to a good sale and then fell through and he was living now on next to no money. It ought to have been unendurable to see a man with such misfortunes, but the suffering brought an expression close to beauty in what had been once an almost dough-shaped face. I think the first horror for him was that he did not know if his suffering was attached to the mystery of pain itself, or whether he was a sport, his illness a fluke, and himself a protagonist of the absurd.

That horror breaks through the reserve he usually managed to maintain in his letters. Let me quote from another written six and a half months before his death. He says it there better than I can, and I think he was enough of a literary man to be pleased that I would say so:

I came across the following in Kierkegaard's *Diary* (p. 19, Entry 18): "All of existence intimidates me, from the tiniest fly to the enigmas of incarnation; as a whole it is inexplicable, my own self most of all; all of existence is pestiferous, my own self most of all. . . ."

I have no pleasure in these days, as well you know, I feel wasted and useless, although in clear moments, there is so much I wish to say, so much I would wish to write where I capable thereof. I remember your saying: "I'm a pro, I can work on a bad day." I'm not a pro, and therefore *must* try to

work on both bad *and* good days. But the raging of the flesh too often burns away all energy, all motivation. And God knows how terribly difficult it is even to sit down at the typewriter, much less write coherently and well. Ideas abound, but I am unable to capture them. . . .

Finally, although I have both fear and disdain for death (the latter possibly being the greatest mistake of all), I smell its stench approaching, and hear the snicker of that jackal somewhere in the night. I feel useless and, worst of all, irrelevant. My strengths, whatever they were, have waned, and my weaknesses are beginning to overwhelm me. And I feel dirty (not only physically). My circle of 'friends' recedes, and I withdraw more and more. I drink more and more. Although before my illness I hardly ever took so much as an aspirin, I fall back on pills of all nature, knowing they are of no use other than a temporary sop. I loathe my body, and have little faith in whatever I might achieve were I not physically afflicted and mentally depressed. Life still has its light moments of frivolity, and I do have a well-developed sense of detachment, but the harsh realities have become a bad film. . . .

. . . I may soon disappear, or I well may hang about a while longer, but these are some things I wanted to say, sooner rather than later.

I send you my love and good wishes,

Frank Crowther

—NORMAN MAILER

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Daniel Boulanger (*The Grand Turk*) is the author of numerous novels and books of poems. His novel, *Les Noces de Merle* was awarded La Prix de la Nouvelle and, in 1966, *Le Chemin des Caracoles* was given La Prix de Saint-Beuve. He is best known for his screenplays which include *Breathless*, *The Bride Wore Black* and *Shoot the Piano Player*. *The Great Turk* originally appeared in *Nouvelle Revue Française*.

Stephen Dixon (*Conclusions*) has published numerous stories in little magazines, a selection of which will appear in *No Relief*, to be published this fall by Street Fiction Press.

David Evanier (*Selective Service*) was the recipient of the Aga Khan Fiction Prize in 1975 for his story *Cancer of the Testicles*. He has recently completed a novel entitled *In Honor of the Grand Rabbi of Brooklyn*.

Charles Hickox (*Four Feuilletons*) lives in Pepper Pike, Ohio, where he divides his time between operating a barnyard railroad, writing and serving as a committee chairman for the National Organization of Women.

Maxine Kumin (*Another Form of Marriage*) was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1973 for her collection of poems, *Up Country*. Her most recent collection, *House, Bridge, Fountain, Gate* was published in 1975 by Viking.

Lee Leggett (translator of Geneviève Serreau) has published translations from the French and Italian in a number of magazines.

Michael McGuire (*Last Words*) has had plays produced by the New York Shakespeare Festival, the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles and elsewhere. His most recent play, *The Summer of the Dance*, will soon be produced by the New York Shakespeare Festival.

Geneviève Serreau (*December*) works as an editor in Paris. *December* is part of a collection, *Ricerare*, which won a Prix d'Honneur.

Patsy Southgate (translator of Daniel Boulanger) is translator of the first French work to appear in *The Paris Review*, a story by Antoine Blondin. She has subsequently translated *The Image* by Pauline Réage, *Going Places* by Bertrand Blier and other novels from the French. She is currently at work on a novel.

POETRY

John Allman has published work in *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest* and elsewhere. He teaches at Rockland Community College in Suffern, New York.

Jack Anderson is the author of three books of poetry, the most recent, *City Joys*, published in 1975 by Release Press. He also regularly writes on dance, and is at work on a history of the Ballet Russe.

David Bergman teaches at Towson State College in Maryland. He is now completing a study of Robert Browning.

Don Bogen has had poems published in *The Chowder Review* and *South Dakota Review*. He teaches at the University of Cincinnati.

Gary Gildner has had three books of poems published by the University of Pittsburgh Press: *First Practice*, *Digging for Indians* and *Nails*. A sonnet sequence, *Letters From Vicksburg*, will be published by Unicorn Press in late 1976.

Albert Goldbarth has a volume forthcoming this fall from Doubleday entitled *Comings Back*. This marks his second appearance in *The Paris Review*.

Elizabeth Handel holds an M.F.A. from Cornell. She lives in Pittsburgh writing freelance articles and poems.

David Ignatow is Poet in Residence at York College of the City University of New York. An interview with him is due to appear next year in *The Paris Review*.

Greg Kuzma has published poems in *The New Yorker*, *The American Scholar*, *The Paris Review* and elsewhere. His collection, *What Friends Are For* was published in 1974 by Best Cellar Press.

Philip Legler is the author of two books of poems, *A Change Of View* and *The Intruder*. His work has appeared in *Ontario Review*, *Southwest Review*, *The Paris Review* and elsewhere.

David Lehman teaches at Hamilton College. He is poetry editor of *The New York Arts Journal* and a broadsheet series, *Poetry in Motion*.

Ed Meek recently received his MFA from Montana University. His work has previously appeared in *The Paris Review*.

Herbert Morris is a poet living in Philadelphia.

Kent Jorgensen Ozarow has studied poetry with Harvey Shapiro, Stanley Kunitz and Jack Anderson.

Aram Saroyan has a new collection entitled *O My Generation and Other Poems* (Blackberry Books). An autobiographical novel, *The Street*, was published in 1975 by The Bookstore Press.

Richard Shelton teaches in the writing program at the University of Arizona. His most recent book is *You Can't Have Everything* (The University of Pittsburgh Press).

A.G. Sobin teaches at Wichita State College in Kansas. His poems previously appeared in *The Paris Review*.

Stephen Sossaman has published poems in *Southern Humanities Review*, *The Carleton Miscellany* and elsewhere. This is his second appearance in *The Paris Review*.

Tom Wayman has recently had his third collection of poems, *Money and Rain: Tom Wayman Live!*, published by Macmillan of Canada.

ART

Anne Bradford is a photographer living in Connecticut. She is represented in New York by Castelli Graphics.

Ed Ruscha is widely represented in museum and private collections, among them The Los Angeles County Museum, The Art Institute of Chicago and The Hirshhorn Collection. He has produced numerous books of his photographs, of which the best known are *Thirty-four Parking Lots*, *Nine Swimming Pools* and *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*. He was included in The Venice Biennale of this year in the show "Critical Perspectives in American Art." In New York he is represented by Leo Castelli.

INTERVIEWS

William Cahill (Interview with John Hall Wheelock) is a native of New Jersey currently teaching high school near Glasgow, Scotland.

Annette Grant (Interview with John Cheever) is an editor and writer living in New York City. A portion of the interview derives from supplementary questions put to Mr. Cheever by George A. Plimpton and Molly McKaughan.

Molly McKaughan (Interview with John Hall Wheelock) is the former managing editor of this magazine and is now managing editor at *Quest/77*. Her interview with J.P. Donleavy appeared in issue #63. Her poems have appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *MS.*, *The Paris Review* and elsewhere.

ERRATUM

In the poem, "Living With You" by Steve Benson, appearing in issue #66, the word "undermine" in the last line of the third stanza should read "undetermine."

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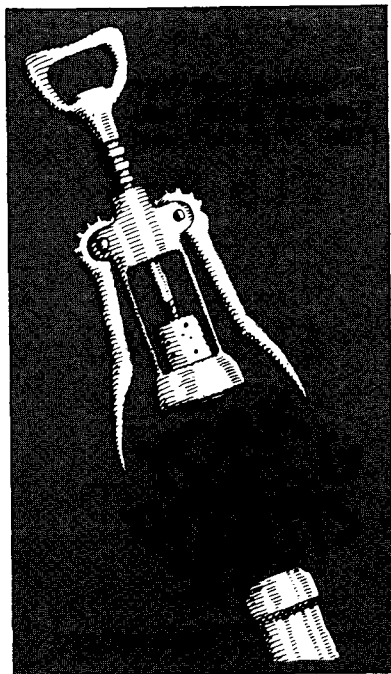
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